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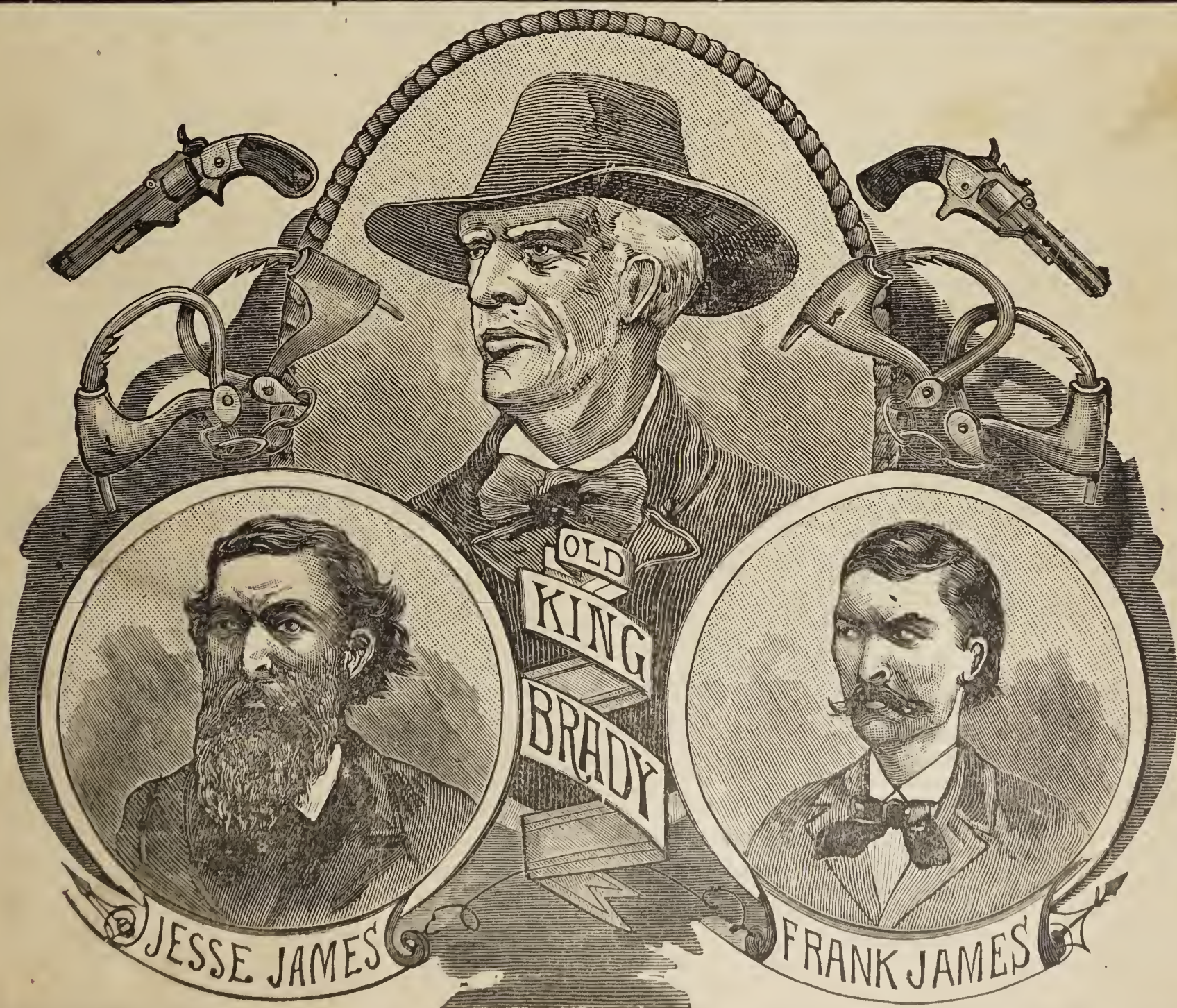
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FRANK TOUSEY, PUBLISHER, 34 and 36 North Moore Street, New York. Box 2730.

OLD KING BRADY AND THE JAMES BOYS.



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Old King Brady and the James Boys.

By A NEW YORK DETECTIVE,

Author of "A Pile of Bricks," "A Bag of Shot; or, Old King Brady Out West," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

ON BOARD THE NIGHT EXPRESS.

It was raining.

More than that, it was raining hard.

For three days now it had been coming down in one steady, monotonous pour, filling the creeks to bursting, sending the rivers rushing, swamping lowlands and bottoms until people were beginning to wonder whether arks could be built without infringing on Noah's patent; for arks would soon be needed if the rain refused to stop. At all events, it began to look very much that way.

"Fine weather, stranger."

"Yaas—fer dncks."

"Looks kinder threaten' off ter the west'ard—wouldn't wonder ef we had a shower 'fore long."

"Yaas."

"How's the corn crop up in Davis's county?"

"Mighty slim. Heou'd you know I belonged in Davis's county?"

"Seen yer thar last spring when I wuz up ter Gallitin, time they organized that expedition against the James Boys."

"Humph! Think I remember yer face, though I can't call yer name."

"Tain't likely, seein' yer never heard it."

"Thet's it. What's it?"

"Dade."

"G'long. Not the sheriff of Ray County?"

"Sartin."

"You don't say! Well, yer hain't caught ther James Boys yet, hev' ye?"

"No."

"Nor tain't likely yer ever will."

"Don't be too sure. What's your name?"

"Coon—Sam Coon. Hev a farin up ter Coonysburg when I'm ter home."

"Thought so. Here she goes—gohn?"

"Na. Goin' ter stop here a spell."

"Good-night."

"Good-night."

Ding, dong! Ding, dong! clattered the locomotive bell, and the long train of the Chicago and Alton Railroad moved out of the station at Missouri City, Clay county, State same name as the town, and was thundering on its way east.

The above conversation took place on the station platform between two passengers who had boarded the night express at Kansas City.

When the stop was made at Missouri City a hot box had been discovered, and the delay was longer than usual.

The ladies in the Pullman clung to their seats, of course, but many, in fact, most of the men, left the car and began pacing the platform outside.

New York and Boston drummers, with stylish clothes and round visorless traveling caps, Western stockmen, easily picked out by their coarse, ill-fitting garments, and broad brim, white felt hats, native Missourians—veritable Pikers—with their pants stuck in their high-top boots, their long hair hanging down over their shoulders, their tobacco-stained beards, big features, and coarse, horny hands.

Such was the crowd at the station on that rainy night in November, 1878.

Such also was the conversation between Mr. Sheriff Dade and Farmer Coon.

It was a typical one, and might have been heard any night or any day, for that matter, throughout Northwestern Missouri at that time, for two strangers could scarcely meet then without some allusion being made to the brothers Frank and Jesse James, the terror of travelers in Missouri, the most noted outlaws of the day.

Hence none of the dozen men who moved about the station platform, stretching their

cramped limbs, appeared to pay much attention to the speakers.

It was, however, only an appearance.

Two persons were listening intently to every word which passed.

One was a tall, slimly-built, sickly young man of twenty two or three, whose cheap, ready-made suit showed signs of travel, and upon whose face was written an expression of deep anxiety and concern.

He stood upon the platform of the Pullman, against which the two men were leaning.

Without being visible himself, he could hear every word that was being said.

The other listener was a person of totally different appearance.

An elderly man, tall and heavily built, with smooth-shaven face, iron-gray hair, and a pair of keen gray eyes, which when they were turned toward you seemed to pierce your inward thoughts.

To look at this man it would have been difficult to determine who or what he was.

With his long blue coat, and broad-brimmed, white felt hat—it was almost as big as the hats of the cowboys in the smoker—he might have been put down for a wealthy stock-raiser, a member of some Shaker community, a returned miner, a Congressman, or an eccentric millionaire.

He stood leaning against a huge box which inclosed a reaping machine. The box was between himself and the speakers, and as it was taller than his head, he could both see and hear without being seen himself.

When the train moved off the young man disappeared, and the older one stepped on board the Pullman and quietly took his seat.

The train rolled on; the evening advanced.

The candles in their hanging sconces flickered dimly; the rain beating against the window

panes, heard above the rattle of the wheels, lent a certain dismalness to the scene, evidently felt by every passenger in the car.

Berth after berth was made up by the porter, one by one the passengers retired, until at last the old man was left alone.

"Shall I make up your berth, sir?" inquired the porter, approaching, anxious to be through with his evening work.

"Yes, if you like, but I shall not retire just yet," replied the old man.

He rose, and, taking out a cigar, bit off the end and thrust it in his mouth, moving toward the door.

The porter naturally supposed he was going to the smoking-room of the Pullman, but he did not.

Instead he opened the door and passed out upon the platform.

The darkness was complete; glimpses of trees rushing past was all that could be discerned. The wind blew so furiously that the man was obliged to put his hand to his broad-brimmed hat. A weaker man might well have been blown from the train.

It was a relief when he gained the platform of the next car and closed the door.

This was an ordinary passenger car, and presented the usual scene.

Squalling babies, tired, red-eyed women, men curled up upon the seats courting the sleep which would not come; others talking in loud, boisterous tones to the annoyance of their neighbors for whom they had never a thought.

The stranger did not tarry here, however, but walking directly through this car and the one beyond, entered the smoker and sat down in the little half seat near the stove.

Directly behind him sat the tall, sickly, young man, who had been the other listener to the conversation alluded to above.

As the old man sat down and flung himself back in the seat his head accidentally struck that of the passenger behind him, who sprang nervously to the other side of the seat and looked around.

"I beg your pardon," said the old man, civilly.

"It's all right, sir. I—I was half asleep. You startled me—that was all."

Whether it was his sudden movement, or whether the motion of the train did it, a large leather grip-sack which lay upon the seat beside him fell to the floor.

The young man made great haste to pick it up; much more so, in fact, than under the circumstances seemed necessary.

This the other noticed, and seemed particularly attracted by it.

By the dim light he eyed the young man curiously, and then, taking the Kansas City morning paper from his pocket, turned to a particular place and began to read.

Presently he folded up the paper, and looked hard at his fellow passenger again.

A smile of singular satisfaction passed over his countenance as he turned abruptly and said:

"Excuse me, friend, will you smoke?"

The cigar offered was a fine one and looked tempting.

There was some hesitation in the manner of the young man, but he accepted it and took the proffered light.

"Nasty night," remarked the stranger, craning his neck around.

"Very."

"Going East?"

"To Chicago."

"Big city that."

"Yes."

"Acquainted in these parts?"

"No."

"Tough country."

"It don't look very inviting just now."

"Look here," said the stranger, rising suddenly and crowding into the seat beside the young man, to the evident disgust of the latter—"look here! Ain't this just the region where the James Boys operate? Excuse me, but we'll get along better if we put this bag of yours in the other seat."

He picked up the bag and without the slightest ceremony tossed it over into the seat behind.

The young man's face grew red with anger.

Still he said nothing, simply rose, recovered the bag, and put it down upon the floor between his legs.

"What's the matter?" inquired the stranger.

"I prefer to have my bag here, that's all."

"Why?"

"Because I do. It's my bag. If it is in your way, there's the seat you just left."

"Exactly. But just now I prefer to sit here."

The only answer was a sullen silence.

"Anything valuable in the bag?" inquired the stranger.

"That's my business."

"Indeed! Did you read the Kansas City papers this morning?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because there was a little item in them that I thought might interest you. If you will permit me, I will read it."

He pulled out the paper again, and in a voice just loud enough to be heard above the rattle of the train, read as follows:

"ANOTHER BANK ROBBERY."

"Dispatches from Coyote, Kansas, last night inform us that a bank robbery took place yesterday morning in that flourishing town, which has thrown the whole community into a commotion.

"The bank—the Coyote City National—is owned and controlled by the well-known Chicago capitalist, John Mortyard, who is president, its vice-president being Henry Mortyard, his nephew, while the cashier was a young man named Tom Powers, a silent, reserved sort of person, who had been the active man in the daily workings of the bank for about a year.

"Day before yesterday Mr. Henry Mortyard went grouse shooting with a party of gentlemen, and was gone over night. When he reached the bank next morning he was amazed to find that Mr. Powers had not put in an appearance, and that the safe was still unopened.

"Somewhat alarmed Mr. Mortyard hastened to open the safe, finding to his dismay that the entire funds of the bank, amounting to upward of \$60,000, had been abstracted during the night.

"It is the old story of a good man gone wrong and there seems no question as to whose shoulders should bear the guilt.

"Mr. Powers was seen to board the midnight east bound train on the Kansas Pacific carrying with him a large black valise, which doubtless contained the missing funds.

"It was a great blow to this section, for the Coyote bank was the pivot about which the entire business of the county revolved.

"The defaulter, moreover, was the last man whom one might have suspected of crooked propensities.

"In person he is tall and thin, with rather a sickly look. Blue eyes and light hair. He wore a gray suit when last seen, with low shoes and a black derby hat. Upon the upper lip, on the left, just under the nose, is a small brown mole, by which he can be easily identified. It is rumored that he will make for Kansas City, thence going to St. Louis, or possibly into the Indian Nation. Mr. Mortyard has offered a reward of

\$5,000 for his apprehension and the recovery of the stolen funds."

The stranger folded up the paper and putting it in his pocket, took several sharp pulls at his cigar which was in danger of going out.

Meanwhile the young man had leaned his arm upon the window sill, and his head upon his hand.

The rain was beating furiously against the panes as the train went rushing on.

He did not speak, he did not even raise his eyes. Every vestige of color had left his cheeks, all over his face was written a look of abject despair.

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked the stranger, quietly.

"It—it does not interest me," was the sullen reply.

"No?"

"No."

"Allow me to differ with you."

"What do you mean?"

"Light hair, blue eyes, gray suit, black hat, brown mole on upper lip! Mr. Tom Powers, allow me to remark that you are anything but a shrewd young man!"

The young man raised his head quickly, and made a movement toward his hip pocket.

"Stop!" whispered the other.

Low down on his lap with the muzzle pointed toward him, the young man now saw a cocked revolver; but no one else could see it; the stranger's face still wore the same placid smile.

"Don't do it," he whispered. "Believe me, it wouldn't pay."

"What—what do you mean? Who are you?"

"Well, my name is Brady. I am a New York detective, acting just now under a special commission in Missouri. That's who I am, my young friend, and you are Tom Powers, the Coyote bank defaulter. I am a little out of my beat, I own, but since I've tumbled to you, it strikes me I may as well earn that \$5,000 as anyone else."

CHAPTER II.

TROUBLE ON THE TRAIN.

FOR several moments a dead silence reigned in the seat where sat Old King Brady, America's most famous detective, and the young man whom he had just accused.

The young man had suffered his hands to fall idly in his lap, and the detective put up his revolver, then coolly took another light for his neglected cigar.

"Well, what are you thinking about?" he asked at length. "Escape is impossible. I have only to appeal to those around us and a dozen men would be at our side. May as well own up that you are Tom Powers. Then we can pass the rest of the night in peace. I shall not take you from the train until we reach Mexico, where I happen to be acquainted with the sheriff. It is utterly useless for you to think of resisting me."

"I was not thinking about it," replied the young man in a tone almost as quiet as that of the detective himself.

"You own up then—you are Tom Powers, the defaulting cashier of the Coyote Bank of Kansas?"

"I am Tom Powers. I am also the cashier of the Coyote Bank of Kansas. Yet I am not a defaulter, as you imply."

"What do you mean?"

"That brings me back to my thoughts about which you asked me just now."

"Ah! what were they?"

"I was wondering what sort of man you were."

"Indeed! You have the money in that bag, I presume?"

"I do not deny it."

"Thinking of bribing me? I warn you it will be useless."

"No, no, I don't mean anything of that sort."

"What then?"

The young man's voice faltered.

"Why," he began, "you have such a kindly look about your face—you—you—the fact is you really look as though you were sorry for me. Do you know I was thinking that perhaps the very best thing I could do would be to tell you all."

Old King Brady smiled.

"Thanks for your good opinion of me," he said. "I think it would."

"But will you believe me?"

"I'll try."

"I'm afraid you won't."

"Don't judge me in advance."

"But my story is so improbable. Perhaps you will say I have acted unwisely, but I have had no one to advise me. My father died before I was born, my mother in giving me birth. I have only my uncle, Mr. Mortyard—a hard, stern man, who has always treated me like an inferior, although I am his dead sister's only child."

"No excuse for wrong-doing, Mr. Powers."

"But I haven't done anything wrong—I protest I haven't! I am simply taking the bank's money to Chicago, with the intention of giving it to Mr. Mortyard, to whom it belongs."

"What?"

"There, I knew you wouldn't believe me."

"Go on."

"You wonder why I am doing this. Listen and I will tell you. The Henry Mortyard mentioned in that article is my cousin. He is also as bad a man as I ever knew."

"Ah!"

"By the merest accident I learned that he had decided to rob the bank himself that night; to do it in company with two of his dissolute companions. They were to take the money and go to Montana, and the crime was to be fixed on me."

"But how did you learn this?"

"No matter. Some one told me."

"One of the companions?"

"Yes, if you must know. He was under some obligation to me, although a desperate fellow. I went to his assistance in a saloon fight a few months ago. He believes that I saved his life."

"Indeed. This grows interesting."

"It was anything but interesting for me, I assure you. I was very unpopular in town and my cousin Henry, on the contrary, was exceedingly well liked. It would have been a very easy matter for him to have carried out the plan, and if I had asked help of any one I would have been laughed at."

"I understand."

"I was almost crazy. I hardly knew what I was doing. Distrusting every one, I at last came to a desperate resolve."

"Were bound to have the game as well as the name."

"I went into the bank, took all the money, put it into this bag and jumped the town, and I swear to you, sir, on the sacred memory of my dead mother that it was with the intention of taking the money to Mr. Mortyard. I am going straight to Chicago. You see yourself I made no effort at disguise, but I never realized my true position until I read the Kansas city papers this morning. Since then I have been in agony, and—and—by gracious! I feel better now. I'm glad that some one knows my secret, come what will."

For a long time Old King Brady continued to regard the face before him in silence.

The young man, meanwhile, made no attempt to speak.

"What was Henry Mortyard's motive for fixing the crime on you?" asked the detective at length.

"He hated me."

"Why?"

"Because——"

"Because what?"

"Well, I may as well tell it all. We are both after the same girl—Ethel Mortyard, our cousin."

"Ah! And she favors you?"

"I can't tell. He would have ruined me in her eyes if he could."

"Young man, you have been guilty of a most imprudent act."

"Then you believe me? You don't think I'm a thief?"

"I am inclined to believe you, for you have told me a very straight story, but how are you going to make any one else believe you after the notoriety your name has received?"

A frightened look came over the young man's face.

"Why, when I give the money to my uncle he will believe me, of course."

"Will he? I doubt it."

"What do you mean?"

"He will say this fellow stole the money but he grew frightened and has brought it to me, with a cock-and-bull story, designed to ruin his Cousin Henry in my eyes, and to spoil his chances of marrying my daughter."

"You don't really think so?"

"I'm sure of it."

"Great heavens! then what is to become of me?"

"I wouldn't be at all surprised if he put you under arrest, even if I decided to let you alone."

"I never looked at it in that light."

"But you see it now?"

"I do."

"Probably your cousin is following you to Chicago. He may even have got ahead of you. Of course he will deny the charge against him, and defy you."

"I see! I see!"

"Then, again, if I conclude to detain you at Mexico, the mere fact of your having been arrested will be fatal."

"But you won't do it?"

"I may. I am thinking about it. First of all, though, I must know if the money is actually in that bag?"

"I assure you that it is."

"Still I must know it. Open the bag and let me see."

"I'd rather not."

"You must."

"Suppose some one else should see?"

"Open it at once, or I will open it for you."

"Well, if you will have it."

Powers took the bag from the floor, and, placing it upon his knees, proceeded to insert the key.

Now, stretched upon the seat opposite lay a rough-looking fellow in the dress of a countryman.

His feet were jammed up under the window-sill, his head rested upon the turn of the seat, his big slouch hat was pulled low down over his eyes.

Apparently he was asleep and had been throughout the entire conversation, but had Old King Brady happened to look at him as Tom Powers opened the bag just far enough to show several big packages of bank-notes inside, he might have seen the hat slightly raised and two sharp, piercing eyes fixed upon the bag.

He saw nothing, however, and consequently suspected nothing.

The bag was closed and returned to its position at Tom Powers' feet.

Old King Brady pulled silently at his cigar, lost in thought.

Should he arrest this young man or not?

Not for the sake of the reward. Upon that he had determined, for he believed the story that had been told him fully.

"I am going to Chicago myself. I will keep with him, and follow him to the banker, and make it my business to see the money is restored to its rightful owner," he reflected. "I——"

Here Old King Brady's reflections were suddenly cut short, for the train began to slow down and presently stopped.

Everybody roused up at once, and began to peer out the windows.

They had left a station not more than ten minutes previous, and even those unfamiliar with the road seemed to comprehend that this was no regular stop the train was making now.

Indeed there seemed to be something unusual going on outside.

Loud voices could be heard talking—a man ran along under the windows, and at the same moment some one shouted out two words, which at the time we write were sufficient to strike terror to the heart of any traveler on a Missouri railroad.

"James Boys!"

"James Boys!"

"They've hung up the train!"

Every one in the car was upon their feet in an instant.

The next, and the door of the baggage car burst open, and a hatless man dashed through as pale as death, followed closely by a tall, powerful fellow wearing a black mask upon the upper part of his face.

"Bang! Bang!"

Two shots were fired in quick succession, and the hatless man fell down in front of the stove—dead.

"It's the express messenger!" shouted some one.

"Hold up your hands, gentlemen!" exclaimed another masked man, who seemed to have suddenly risen up before them.

Meanwhile the one who had fired the shots leaped past Old King Brady and was engaged in rifling the pockets of the dead messenger—probably searching for his key.

Outside the excitement seemed to be tremendous. Back in the Pullman the frantic shrieks of the frightened women could be heard.

Just then two more masked men dashed into the smoker just as the second one who had appeared stepped over to Old King Brady and pressed a revolver against his head.

It was all done in an instant, though it takes time to put the scene into comprehensive words.

"This fellow is the man who lay asleep opposite," flashed across the detective, and he was right.

"Make a move, old fellow, and I'll blow your brains out," he whispered warningly. "Young man, hand me over that ere bag of boodle I seen you showing awhile back."

"Never!" cried Tom Powers, as pale as a ghost. "Never! I'll defend it with my life."

Bang! Bang!

The man suddenly staggered back and tumbled over the seat on the other side.

"Oh, I'm shot!" he shouted. "The old cuss with the white hat did it!"

While he had been speaking to Tom, Old King Brady had contrived to draw his revolver. It was he who had fired the shots.

Bang! Bang!

Crack! Crack.

It seemed to Tom as though shots were flying in every direction.

Half the men in the smoker had crawled under the seats—the other half were making for

the door—Old King Brady was in the act of firing at the murderer of the express messenger when the man he had shot suddenly rallied, and with a furious blow with his fist felled him to the floor.

"Pitch him into the creek!" he shouted. "He's a detective—a spy!"

Two masked men sprang forward, and picking up the detective hurried him toward the door.

Probably the wounded outlaw had given the order simply to get rid of his companions, for he now staggered toward Tom, who had opened the window with some faint idea of crawling through.

"Give me that bag, young fellow!" he hissed, speaking in a whisper. "Quick!"

He had picked up the revolver dropped when Old King Brady's bullet struck him.

Though evidently wounded severely, he seemed perfectly cool.

Tom was tremendously frightened, as well he might be.

To attempt to defend himself meant death. He did not even dare to make a motion to draw his revolver.

Upon one thing, however, he was determined—the outlaws should not have the bag which contained the money from the Coyote bank.

"If you want it go get it!" he exclaimed.

Seized by a sudden impulse, he threw the bag through the open window, and sank back all nerveless in his seat.

"What did you do that for?" demanded the outlaw, with a fearful oath, at the same time striking the boy a wicked blow across the face with the butt of his pistol.

Maddened by the blow, Tom pulled out his own weapon, leaped up and fired twice.

Bang! Bang!

Bang! Bang! came the answer.

Tom felt a sharp, stinging sensation in his left side. Everything began whirling about him. He tottered forward and knew no more.

CHAPTER III.

ALONE IN THE FOREST.

RED hot iron thrust into an open wound.

Burning thirst, aching bones, a bursting head.

These were the sensations experienced by Tom Powers when consciousness returned.

But where was he?"

Lying in a pool of water apparently.

The rain was beating down upon him, the wind was sweeping furiously among the trees which surrounded him on every side, and the darkness was intense.

Tom managed to scramble to his feet, but with difficulty.

Now for the first time the young man realized the folly of his hasty act.

Every word of the strange story he had repeated to Old King Brady had been true.

He had taken the money of the Coyote bank for the best of motives and now—

Why, now it was gone—gone to enrich the members of the notorious James gang probably, and he would be branded as a felon to the end of his days.

Is it any wonder that the poor fellow leaned against a tree and wept.

His left arm was broken and hung helpless. The wound in the side pained him terribly. He was alone in the forest in the raging storm—there seemed nothing for it but to give up and die.

"But I won't do that," thought Tom, straightening up. "For Ethel's sake I must be brave. No night so black but morning must come some time, no road so long but it must have an end. That's what my old school-teacher used to say, and—Hark! what cry was that?"

It was a voice calling in the forest.

"Hollo!" it said. "Hello! Hello!"

The wind seized the words and seemed to whirl them off among the tree tops.

The cry seemed to come from a great distance, but then that might be the deception of the storm.

"Hello! hello!" called Tom feebly for he was getting weaker, it seemed.

There was no answer.

Evidently he was on the wrong side of the wind to make himself heard.

The cry had blown toward him, and he could scarcely expect his feeble shout to blow back against that living gale.

Tom looked about him.

He was standing at the foot of a high embankment, upon which the railroad ran.

Before him, behind him, and on either side was a dense growth of oaks and maples, broken only by the railroad and a mill creek, which, swollen by the rain, went foaming and tumbling under a high trestle bridge.

"They flung me off the train, thinking I was dead," thought Tom. "That's the way my arm got broken. I'd give anything in the world to know if they got that bag."

He sighed as he thought of it.

Devoutly he wished he had never left Chicago for the semi-barbarous regions beyond the Missouri.

"I must get somewhere; do something, or I shall perish," he thought, gloomily, and the first thing he did was to climb the embankment and look for the train.

There was no signs of it.

Tom could not even feel certain that the place where he now found himself was the actual scene of the robbery.

The bag was gone—hopelessly gone.

Now he need expect no one to believe his story.

He would be branded as a felon for the rest of his life.

"Hello! Hello! Hello!"

The voice in the forest had suddenly began calling again.

Now that he was up out of the hollow, the sound was more distinct.

It seemed to come from the other side of the creek, and not at any great distance either.

Was it the cry of friend or foe?

"Surely the James Boys would never signal each other in that fashion," repeated Tom. "Maybe it's someone left by the train—some fellow who got scared and took to the woods. Guess I'll try to make him hear."

"Hello! Hello!" he shouted.

"Hello! Hello!"

This was unquestionably a reply.

"Where are you?" yelled Tom, with as much strength as he could muster.

"Over here on the other side of the creek."

"Who are you?"

"Passenger on the C. and A. pitched off by the James boys. Who are you?"

"Same here."

"If you're lying beware! The James boys have robbed me, but they have left me one revolver."

"You needn't fear me; I'm half dead myself—shot in the shoulder, and got a broken arm beside."

"You're worse than I am," replied the voice, and a great crashing among the bushes on the other side of the creek could be heard.

"I've only got a good shaking up. They thought they'd killed me, but I'm one of the tough kind. Where are you, anyhow? Upon the track?"

"Yes."

"I'm down in the hollow. How can I get across?"

"Don't ask me. I don't know anything about the country."

"It's as dark as Egypt, but as near as I can make out it is going to be as much as my life is worth to cross the trestle bridge. I'd try the creek only I don't know how to swim."

Tom meanwhile had crept close to the bridge and was taking a survey.

It stood fully one hundred feet up from the bed of the creek.

There was not even a board laid down over the sleepers.

To cross it during the daytime would be risky for a man inclined to dizziness, for the creek was rushing beneath like a mill race. How much greater the risk then in the inky blackness that prevailed, with the wind whirling past at the rate of at least sixty miles an hour and the sleepers all slippery with drenching rain.

"Hello!" called Tom.

"Hello!" cried the stranger.

"I can't cross the bridge—I'm too weak. I shall be blown away."

"I'll try to come to you then," replied the voice. "I'm a bit of a surgeon and may be able to set your arm if it's not too badly broken. You just hold on there, I'm coming up the bank."

Then there was a great scrambling, and the noise of stones and gravel rolling down the side of the embankment, and presently the outlines of a man's tall form loomed upon the other side of the bridge, perhaps fifty feet away.

"I rather think I can cross this," Tom heard him shout. "Anyway, I'm going to try it. If I'm blown to kingdom come, good-bye."

He struck out upon the bridge boldly, stepping from sleeper to sleeper with extreme caution.

As he approached, Tom saw that he was carrying something very like a big grip-sack in his hand.

The boy's heart beat wildly.

"Could it be?"

It was possible.

He had thrown the bag from the window of the smoker.

Very likely it had rolled down the side of the embankment.

But would the stranger give it up if he were to claim it?

This was the question which bothered Tom Powers now.

Nearer and nearer came the man.

More and more certain Tom became that he was carrying the precious bag.

Suddenly a recollection dawned upon him.

That tall form—that big, broad-brimmed hat!

"Old King Brady, the detective!" he exclaimed, as the stranger covered the last sleeper on the bridge.

"Tom Powers! It can't be!"

"But it is!"

"I see it now. Thank your lucky star, boy! I've got your bag!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE LONE HOUSE IN THE WOOD.

"Is it really you, Mr. Brady?"

"No one else, lad, no one else."

"Thank God! I thought they'd kill you."

"Not quite—rather not at all. I'm badly shaken up, but that's nothing. I'm one of the tough kind."

"Where did you find the bag?"

"Down among the bushes by the creek, where the outlaws threw me. But for this blessed rain which has made the ground a perfect swamp I shouldn't be here now."

"They must have thrown me down, too. Have you opened the bag?"

"No. I had no key."

"Let us do it now."

The key was produced and the bag opened.

By the light of a small pocket-lantern produced by the detective its interior was hurriedly examined.

The money was found intact.

"I can't understand why the outlaws did not go after it," said Tom. "They saw me throw it out the window, and they knew what it contained."

"Perhaps they were scared off."

"It ain't likely. Nothing scares the James Boys."

"Sure they were the James Boys?"

"Of course I can't be sure. That's what the passengers were calling out."

"It may have been so. Still, there are other train robbers in Missouri beside the James Boys. But there's no use in wasting any more time talking about it. Here we are, and now comes the question, where are we, and what are we going to do?"

"I wish first of all you'd examine my arm. It's terribly painful."

"I'll do that. Humph! Compound fracture of the humerus. I'm afraid I can do nothing for you, my poor boy."

"I was afraid you couldn't. Well, I must bear it the best I can. Hadn't we better be moving?"

"Where to?"

"Anywhere."

"Do you know where we are?"

"Indeed I don't."

"Do you recollect the last station that was called before the attack?"

"Not even that. I was so busy at the time talking to you."

"There may not be a house for miles."

"That's so."

"Still we had better be moving. We stand a fair chance of perishing if we stay where we are in the wet and cold."

"I'm afraid I can't walk very far," said Tom, with a groan.

"Oh, you can do more than you think for if you only make up your mind to it!" replied the detective. "Here, let me make a sling of my big handkerchief. It will serve to brace your broken arm and ease the pain."

It did.

Feeling much relieved, Tom walked along by the detective's side.

It was hard walking.

Tom had never experienced anything like it.

At every step the rushing wind threatened to blow them off the embankment and hurl them into the gully below.

By and by, however, they got clear of the gully.

Now the track ran directly through a densely wooded country, broken by small hills.

For nearly a mile they continued thus, and then poor Tom felt his strength give out.

"I can go no further," he said despairingly.

"You must."

"I can't. It is no use."

"Try."

"I have been trying for the last ten minutes. My strength is all gone."

"It will be a bad job if we have to stay here," muttered Old King Brady. "If we could only get through to the next station now."

"You go on and leave me. Save yourself, Mr. Brady. It can't be helped."

"And the bag?"

"Take that with you. I can trust you to take it to Mr. Mortyard."

"Which I would certainly do were I mean enough to abandon you, but I ain't."

"But you can do nothing for me."

"I am not so sure of that."

"Oh, I'm past help," groaned Tom, who had sunk down by the side of the track. "Go, Mr. Brady, get Save yourself and save the money. Do not think of me."

"Hold out!" exclaimed the detective, suddenly. "Don't I see a light over there among the trees on the left?"

"It certainly is a light."

"That means a house—rest—shelter."

"Don't be too sure. It may be a rendezvous of the outlaws."

"Oh, you can imagine anything."

"The James Boys have friends all over the country. These Missourians are pretty much all alike. Half of the people in this region would be outlaws if they dared."

"Oh, not quite so bad as that, I guess."

"It ain't far from it. All they lack is courage."

"No one can deny that the James Boys have courage of a certain kind."

"What do you mean by a certain kind?"

"Well, they haven't got the courage to be honest men, have they? They haven't the courage to give up robbing and murdering. Sentimental women and evil-minded men may prate of their courage as much as they choose, but I tell you it takes a good sight more courage to face the battle of life bravely, to meet all its ups and downs with a cheerful, hopeful heart than to lay aside all sense of right and wrong and take from our neighbors the money we are too lazy or too stupid to earn for ourselves."

"Every one don't think as you do, Mr. Brady. Why Jesse James is often seen in Kansas City walking the streets as fearless as any one. Half the people there worship him as a hero, and no one dares to lay a finger on him, and that in the face of a reward of \$50,000 for his arrest and that of his long-faced brother Frank."

"The more shame to the people of Kansas City then," replied the old detective. "You are strange folks out West here, anyhow. Why in New York——"

"Oh, you New Yorkers don't understand our people."

"Thank God we don't! There we hang our murderers and send up our thieves, where they will at least be prevented from preying on their neighbors."

"Not all of them."

"We do when we catch 'em. Do you suppose the James Boys could exist in any Eastern State? I tell you no. They'd be hunted down in less than a month."

"But——"

"But one would think you were upholding them, young man. If you ain't careful I shall begin to lose my good opinion of you."

"No, no; you don't understand me. I only admire the courage of the James Boys. I don't approve of their crimes, of course."

But Old King Brady, stern, honest old soul that he was, failed to comprehend the distinction.

And yet, in his way, Tom Powers was honest, too.

He was only giving expression to the general feeling of admiration for personal courage, no matter in what form that courage may manifest itself.

Such sentiments as his can be found all over the West, and it is precisely this feeling that has bred such scoundrels as the James gang, the Younger gang, and other ruffians, who respect neither God nor man.

"There's no use in talking any more about it," said Old King Brady, shortly. "Since you are strong enough to talk, I guess you can manage to walk a bit further, anyhow. We'll push on and see what that light means."

"Into the woods?"

"Yes."

"I'm afraid we can't go far."

"We'll go as far as we can."

"I'm willing to try," groaned Tom, and he arose and staggered on.

The brief rest had done him more good than he had thought for.

He had scarcely expected to be able to walk ten steps, but as it was he pushed on by the side of the detective for fully a quarter of a mile among the oak trees.

The light grew brighter as they advanced, until at last coming suddenly out into a small clearing they saw standing before them a log hut, at the very edge of the woods.

It was a dreary, desolate looking spot.

Before the house was a well with its long sweep, behind was a small barn, a few outbuildings, and a long pile of wood ready for winter use.

No fence surrounded the lot, but beyond the well the detective could see a wagon road extending off into the forest.

As they approached two big dogs flew out barking furiously, and at the same time the light, which had been burning behind the gable window nearest to them, was seen to move.

"Down, down!" cried Old King Brady, as the dogs came leaping about him.

Now if there was one thing which the detective prided himself upon more than another, it was his influence over dogs.

Certainly he displayed it upon this occasion, for the animals seemed to recognize a master immediately, and came pawing about him, then bounded off toward the door of the house.

"Come on," whispered Old King Brady. "We have nothing to fear from them. The only thing that worries me is all this money. I wish to heavens it was safe out of my hands."

"You don't wish it any more than I do," groaned Tom. "There's something about this house that frightens me. I——"

"What?"

"I don't know."

"Pshaw! You're weak and nervous. Here goes."

They had reached the door of the cabin now, and the detective, raising his fist, gave a knock that might have aroused the dead.

At the same instant the light disappeared.

They waited for several minutes, but there was no answer.

Again Old King Brady thundered upon the door, and still again.

"Hello there! Hello! Hello!" he shouted.

Roused again by the sound of his voice the dogs set up a dismal howl.

Suddenly the light reappeared shining through the crevices between the logs, and the sound of footsteps was heard.

"What yer want?" called a shrill, harsh, female voice, inside. "We're only two lone women here. We hain't a-goin' ter let no strangers in."

"But, my dear madam, listen to reason!" called Old King Brady. "We are respectable citizens, we have met with an accident. One of us has been shot and beside that is suffering from a broken arm."

"Shot! Great grief! Who shot ye?"

"The James Boys!"

"Oh! Oh! James Boys! Go way! Go way, at onct! ye can't come in here."

"What's the matter with you?"

"Didn't yer say yer wuz tho James Boys?"

"No, I didn't."

"Did too. I hearn you."

"Be sensible, my good soul. I seld that my friend here had been shot by the James Boys."

"Oh!"

"He's got a broken arm, too, and is really in great peril."

"Wall, I can't help it."

"How would you like to find him dead on your doorstep to-morrow morning? It's a terrible night. Surely, you wouldn't refuse a dog shelter in such a storm?"

"Wouldn't I? Now what's the use of axin' nonsensical questions? Don't yer see I've got ther dogs out ez it is? Don't never let them sleep in ther house under no sarcumstances. Yer must be deaf and blind, stranger, strikes me."

"Come, come!" exclaimed the detective.

"Won't do it. I'm gwine to stop right hyar."

"Let us in, or I shall be tempted to break the door down."

"Yer do, hey? Don't yer try it. My old man was killed fightin' Yankees time of ther war. Guess I kin fight sum tew, an' I'll show yer if yer try any monkey bizness, I'll be dogoned if I don't!"

"Phew! we've caught a Tartar, I'm afraid, Tom," muttered Old King Brady—"a regular old she puke," (inelegant as the word may seem, such is actually the name by which Missourians are designated by the residents of the neighboring States.)

"We must get in somehow."

"And I intend to," replied the detective.

"Once more, madam," he called, "will you show a little Christian spirit and give us shelter for the night?"

"Deed I won't. Go way."

"I shall be forced to resort to extreme measures."

"Yer can do what yer dogon please. I'm a lone widdier, but I'm terrible respectable. No man can't come inter my house after midnight. Go on, I say, go on!"

"Good gracious, ma'am, I'm an old man—old enough to be your father, and my companion is a mere boy."

"Yer be, hey? Mebbe yer don't know I'm seventy-nine years old myself. Be you a hundred? Stranger, yer lyin'! Yer give yerself away bad! Sic 'em, Tiger—sic 'em, old boy!"

But Tiger refused to sic.

"Oh, botheration take the old hag!" cried the detective, losing all patience at last. "Look out, Tom: I'm going to burst in the door!"

He drew back and threw himself against the door with all his force.

Now there's a knack about bursting in doors just the same as in everything else.

It was not the first door Old King Brady had forced by many.

The woman's voice could be heard screaming murder.

She was calling to some one named Carrie to "Get the gun!" but before the command could by any possibility have been obeyed the door went flying inward, with Old King Brady tumbling after it.

He found himself face to face with the most hideous old hag upon which it had ever been the fortune of his eyes to rest.

"Great Scott!" groaned poor Tom. "Rather than be at the tender mercies of that woman I'd sleep our here in the rain."

But just then there appeared behind the hag a face so sweet and gentle and so pretty withal, that Tom speedily altered his mind.

"They don't look like robbers, grandmother," a low, melodious voice said. "I think you'd be safe to let them come in."

CHAPTER V.

MOTHER MIX.

"MADAM, your most obedient," said Old King Brady, bowing in the politest fashion. "Pardon me for breaking down your door."

The woman before whom the detective bowed stood at least six feet three in her bare feet—she wore neither shoes nor stockings.

A single garment of dirty cotton cloth reached to her feet. Her face was one mass of wrinkles, her hair as white as snow, and gathered up in one big knot upon the top of her head. Below a retreating forehead two small, black, beadlike eyes twinkled viciously; below the eyes was a nose as strongly hooked as any Hebrew's; below the nose sunken lips, behind which were displayed horrible, toothless gums, black from long devotion to that filthy habit so common in the southwest, "dipping" snuff.

That the girl who stood behind her grasping an old shot-gun was of widely different appearance, need not be said.

She, also, was in her nightdress, which only served to make her well-proportioned form appear more to advantage.

Old King Brady scarcely noticed her, but Tom caught a glimpse of a mass of golden curls, a pair of rosy cheeks beneath the prettiest sort of blue eyes, and when she spoke, and displayed two rows of shiny white teeth behind coral lips, the young cashier for the moment seemed to forget his pain and troubles. Never, it seemed to him, had he heard a voice so sweet and musical before.

"I'll shoot ye!" screamed the hag, glaring at Old King Brady. "Carrie, give me that 'ere gun!"

Perhaps the girl understood what was coming, for she had fled into the room behind, carrying with her the gun.

"Tut, tut! Be sensible, my good woman—be sensible," expostulated the detective, fitting the door in place and managing to make it sufficiently secure to keep out the rain. "No one is going to harm you. I will pay for everything I get."

"Carrie! Carrie! I'll whallop you for this! Bring the gun, child—the gun!"

"Sit down and behave yourself, or there'll be trouble," said Old King Brady firmly.

"Do you order me about in my own house?"

"Tut, tut!"

"Don't talk to me."

"I must. I don't like to."

"You're a long-necked old crow."

"Upon my word? Well, you are certainly not the worst-looking woman I ever saw. You must have been a downright beauty in your day."

"Get out."

"Pardon me. I've had too much trouble to get in. Will you smoke a cigar?"

He knew them, these Missourians, did Old King Brady, sly fellow that he was.

The cigar did the business,

The woman soon gave up, and began hunting for a match.

"Here's one," said the detective. "Now, ma'am, be reasonable. You must see yourself we can go no further to-night."

"But think of my repertashun ef yer stay herel!"

"We might sleep in the barn, but first get us something to eat, and get me some old rags, for I want to try and set this young man's arm."

"Wall, now, stranger, I'd like ter, but it's God's truth I hain't got a dust o' meal in ther house."

"Come—come, Mrs.—Mrs.—"

"Mix. My name's Mix."

"Be reasonable, Mrs. Mix."

"I'm the reasonablest critter this side of St. Louis, mister, but you can't make hoe cake out nothin' shorter meal no how."

"Any bacon?"

"Noter sliver."

"How about ham?"

"Noter smell."

"Worse and worse. You might kill a chicken. I'll pay you well for all I get."

"Chickens! Chickens, did yer say? Lord bless yer, the James boys come and took every blessed chicken ther wuz on the place two weeks ago, and what they didn't get the foxes did—so there!"

At the mention of the James Boys Tom gave a slight start.

"Don't let's bother about eating," he whispered. "Find out where we are. Perhaps, after all, we'd better not stay here. I'm not as bad as I was."

"Go lie down on that old bench near the fire, and leave me to talk with her," replied Old King Brady. "Out of here I won't budge till sunrise unless I'm driven out."

Tom followed the advice.

Over on one side of the room a log fire smoldered upon an open brick hearth.

There was an long wooden settee before the fire, and this, with a table, one or two splint bottom chairs, and a few pieces of rag carpet, completed the furnishing of the room.

As Tom stretched himself out upon the settee Old King Brady dropped into one of the chairs.

Meanwhile Mrs. Mix, pulling at the cigar like an old hand at the business, kept walking up and down, muttering to herself.

"So you can't give us anything to eat, Mrs. Mix?" continued Old King Brady, drawing nearer to the fire in the hope of drying his dripping clothes.

"Noter taste."

"I'll pay you."

"Money ain't much use ter me. I'd a dogoned sight ruther have terbacker."

"I'll give you at least a half box of cigars if you'll get us a good supper and help me to set this poor fellows arm."

"Tell yer I kean't. Hain't got nothin' in ther house."

"Where are we? At least you can tell me that."

"In Missouri, ter be sure."

"Of course, but what part?"

"Carrol County."

"What's the next station on the railroad?"

"Round City."

"How far?"

"'Bout fourteen mile."

"Is this the road leading from your house?"

"You kin go that way ef yer like."

"Will it bring us to Round City?"

"Reckon not. Round City lies the other way."

"Woman, do be reasonable."

"Tell yer ther hain't nothin' onreasonable about me, but I don't want yer here, that's flat. Who be yer, anyhow? Peddlers?"

"No."

"What yer got in ther bag?"

"Oh, that's my affair."

"Humph! Don't get sassy."

"It don't seem to make any difference with you whether I'm civil or sassy, you continue your unchristian-like attitude all the same."

"Now never you mind my attitude, and az fer christianlike, I want you to understand that I was baptized inter the Baptist Church afore you was born. I— Great snakes! Ef thet gal hasn't lit a fire in ther kitchen, and is fryin' bacon! Carriel Carrie, you wretch, you'll pay dear for this!"

She dashed through a door and could be heard loudly expostulating.

Meanwhile the appetizing smell of frying bacon reached the detective's nose.

"I don't care! They shall be treated decent," he heard the girl say.

Tom smiled faintly.

Had the girl seen the look of admiration in his eyes?

Then followed a war of words.

It ended in victory for Carrie.

Not only was a substantial meal furnished to the weary travelers, but Tom's arm was set after a fashion, and he was put to sleep in what Old King Brady made out to be the girl's own bed.

It was high time.

Fever had already begun to develope.

When Old King Brady left him asleep an hour later and descended the ladder into the living room, where Mother Mix was enjoying her third cigar before the smoldering fire, with Carrie now dressed and bustling about putting things to rights, he felt grave fears for the life of the unfortunate young man.

"Say, mister, yer owe me thet half box of cigars," snapped the old crone, as the detective appeared.

"So I do. Well, here they are."

He felt in all his pockets and managed to scrape together six—all he had.

"Is that all?" demanded Mother Mix, dissatisfied.

"All I've got."

"You lie. There's more in that black bag. I've lifted it—it's heavy as lead."

"Oh, you're mistaken," replied the detective, pulling the bag out from under the settee. "This belongs to my friend. I think I'll take it upstairs."

He did so. Climbing the ladder to the loft, he hid the bag under the bed upon which Tom lay groaning in an uneasy sleep.

When he reached the sitting-room again, the dogs outside were barking furiously.

Coming from the direction of the road the tramp of horses' feet could be heard.

Mother Mix was on the alert, peering through the half open door.

"Good Lord! Ef 'tain't Jesse James an' Frank!" she suddenly cried.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE CHIMNEY.

"THE James Boys!" exclaimed Old King Brady in despair.

Mother Mix grinned.

"Sartin," she said, coolly. "Don't yer see 'em comin' long ther road?"

Old King Brady peered through the crack of the partly open door.

To his surprise, he found that the storm had suddenly passed. The full moon was just rising above the tree-tops, its light falling full upon the faces of several horsemen who were just entering the clearing.

"Them's the James Boys!" cried the woman. "An' thar's Jim Cummings, Clel Miller, and one or two others what I don't know."

"Shut the door—quick!" breathed Old King Brady. "We must do something to defend ourselves! I'll not prove easy game."

"What should I shut the door for?" sneered Mother Mix, and she would have flung it wide open if Old King Brady had not prevented her.

"Do you want to be killed?"

"Lor! Jesse James wouldn't kill me. I've knowed Jess ever sence he wuz knee-high to a grasshopper. Ez fer Frank, I nursed him. Uster to live next door to ther widder James afore she wuz Mrs Samuels. Knowed her first husband, too. She give me her baby to nurse becase —"

"Thunder and lightning, then you're a friend of the James Boys?" burst out Old King Brady.

"You bet. Don't be scared."

"There'll be trouble here unless you can show me some means to escape with my friend at once."

"Keen't be did. Yer couldn't get outer the clearing afore Jess'd hev ye cold, but I tell yer what, Mister——"

"Well, well?"

"I believe you are a peddler, an' hev a hull lot more cigars and plug terbacker in that thar black bag. Promise me some on 'em I'll see 't Jess don't do yon no harm."

"Be it so. Here's a twenty-dollar gold piece for you beside."

Mother Mix seized the coin with a chuckle.

"Come," she said briefly, nor was there any time to be lost, for the furious barking of the dogs told that the outlaws were right on hand.

"Go up in the loft an' shet down ther trap," said the old woman hurriedly. "Carrie's tu bed up thar, too, an' Jess'll never think of going up."

Old King Brady, seeing no other way, ran nimbly up the ladder.

He could not hope to fight the whole James gang single handed—moreover he was greatly disturbed about Tom Powers and the bag.

The instant he had gained the top of the ladder he pushed the heavy trap-door into place.

Scarce had this been accomplished when he heard a thundering knocking at the door, which was immediately followed by a loud crash.

The door, loose from its hinges, had fallen in.

"Hello, Mother Mix! Hello, there!" cried a stern, but not unpleasant voice. "What in thunder is the matter with your door?"

"Lorszeel! thet you, Jess? An' Frank, tew, I vow. Who'd hev ever thought of seein' you this time of night?" Old King Brady, listening at the trap could hear the old woman say.

Meanwhile upon the bed behind him Tom was turning and tossing, groaning piteously in his sleep.

Nor was there any way of quieting him. The situation had become critical indeed.

"Looks like if you had visitors, mother?" laughed Jesse, leaping from his horse.

"Yes, and not very welcome ones, eyther," added the solemn Frank. "At least I should judge so by the looks of the door."

"That wuz the wind," replied the hag. "Whet yer want, Jesse? You cleaned me out t'other day, yer know. Chickens takes time ter grow."

"We hain't after chickens to-night, mother," said the outlaw, as with his brother he entered the room below Old King Brady.

"Hello!" he cried. "I thought so. Some one has been here. Who was it? Speak."

"Jess, there hain't been nobody."

"You lie, old woman, you lie."

"Fore God, I don't. Carrie an' me was jist having a little bite, ef it's the table you mean."

"Do you eat supper at one o'clock in the morning?"

"We did to-night."

"Don't trifle with me, mother. Where is Carrie?"

"In bed."

"I want to see her."

"You can't."

"I will."

"You shan't. Jess, you orter be ashamed of yerself. I'll tell yer wife."

"Leave her to me, brother," put in Frank. "Now, mother, out with it. What does this mean?"

"Don't mean nothin'. Frank. Ef yer want some tea, yer shall hev the best I've got; but ez for Carrie——"

"There, there! You know well enough we wouldn't harm the girl. Look here, mother, we robbed the C. & A. express to-night."

"Lor! Yer don't say!"

"We did."

"Where?"

"Down to Brandy creek."

"You'll swing yet, boys."

"Don't croak. Now listen; there was a young man on board that train who carried a large black gripsack. Has he been here?"

"No."

"Nor an old man, tall, with a white hat and a big nose?"

"No."

"Mother, there is more than \$50,000 in that bag."

"Lor! Yer don't say!"

"Tell the truth now. We have reason to believe that the very men we want are at this moment in your house."

"Frank! I swar to gracious——"

"Take care of it! Don't let them get it!" a loud voice was just then heard shouting from the loft above.

Old King Brady heard the cry with a sinking heart.

It was poor Tom delirious.

He was sitting bolt upright in bed shouting wildly.

"We are lost!" thought Old King Brady. "What shall I do? Is it my duty to look to the boy, or to save the money in the bag?"

He decided instantly in favor of the latter course.

It seemed hardly probable that the outlaws would murder a helpless, demented man in cold blood.

On the other hand Old King Brady knew that they would show him no mercy once the bag was discovered beneath the bed.

"Who is that?" he heard Jesse James shout.

"It's only Carrie talking in her sleep," the old woman whined.

Old King Brady waited for nothing further. His quick wit had already grasped the situation. He saw one chance and one only for escape.

"Lie down and keep quiet!" he said to Tom, sternly.

Leaping to the bed, he pulled the precious bag out from beneath it, rushed to the window and threw up the sash.

Fortune favored him.

He could hear the stamping of horses around on the other side of the house, but none of the outlaws were in sight.

He could also hear someone ascending the ladder, and the sound told him that there was not a moment to be lost.

Running his left arm through the handle of the bag, Old King Brady cautiously climbed out of the window and stood upon the sill.

The roof was right above him, and to climb upon it would have offered no difficulty, but for the troublesome burden of the bag.

Projecting from the logs was a small iron hook, perhaps placed there to support a bird-cage.

"If I could only hang the bag here for a moment, I could get up without the slightest difficulty," thought the detective.

He did so, but to his dismay the hook gave way beneath the weight, and down tumbled the bag into a clump of bushes which grew along side the house.

"Holy Virgin! that settles it!" he panted. "It's no use to try to get it, I suppose, but anyhow I'm going to make the attempt."

He was just about to leap down into the garden and take his chances, when a warning bark from Tiger caused him to shoot a glance down.

It was well that he did so.

There was a man just coming around the corner of the house; a man whose features were concealed behind a black mask, and who seemed fully prepared to give Old King Brady a warm reception, if one could judge by the length of his shotgun.

"Hello up thar!" he shouted.

Old King Brady, instead of answering, gave one spring, and managed, without much difficulty, to draw himself up upon the roof, the edge of which he was already grasping.

Here he dropped down flat just in time to avoid receiving a full charge of shot in his back.

Bang! Bang!

This from the long-barreled shot-gun.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

That from Old King Brady's revolver as, lying flat upon his stomach on the sloping shingles, he fired down into the yard.

"Great snakes! What's all that for, Eph Pawlet?" shouted a voice below him.

A head wearing a big, broad-brimmed white hat was thrust out of the window of the room he had just left.

Bang! Bang! went the long-barreled shot-gun.

"Holy Salamander! What yer doing?"

"That you, Captain James?"

"Yes!"

"Thought it wuz that long-legged cuss with the white hat just like yourn."

"Was he here?"

"Yaas. Minute ago."

"Where is he now?"

"Muster climbed onto the roof. Thought I seed somebuddy climbin' up, but ther smoke wuz in my eyes. I'd just fired."

"You lie! It's the whisky in your brain. It's that blasted detective?"

"Shouldn't wonder."

"If he's on the roof I'll fix him!"

"Guess yes. We'll fix him. Whar's the boy?"

"Here in bed, crazy as a bug."

"Whar's the bag?"

"Haven't had time to look for that yet. Can you see the detective?"

"Naw."

Jesse James leaned forward further out of the window.

Bang! Bang, went two shots, and down tumbled the big white hat at Pawlet's feet.

A string of imprecations followed.

"What did you fire at me for?" roared Jesse.

"You blame near hit me that time."

"Didn't fire."

"You didn't?"

"Naw."

"Then it must be the feller on the roof."

"Shouldn't wonder."

"Can you see him?"

"Naw."

"Go back a little and look up."

"And get shot?"

"Obey me."

"Bang! Bang!"

"I'm shot!" roared Pawlet, sinking to the earth. "Good-bye, Jess! I'm done fer, sure."

Old King Brady peered over the edge of the roof to view the result of his work.

He had not intended to shoot Pawlet. The shot had been aimed at Jesse James in the window. There was no help for it now, however, the deed was done.

"Hello, up there!" shouted Jesse. "If you don't come down, my friend, I'll make mince meat of you."

Old King Brady drew back just in time to avoid a shot.

He did not attempt to return it.

It was too dangerous to lean over the edge of the roof now.

It struck him forcibly that the remark of Jesse James was rather a foolish one.

If he didn't come down he was to be transformed into mince meat.

Was it likely that he would fare any better at the hands of this bloodthirsty ruffian who had

murdered twenty men at least in cold blood if the truth was told.

"I'm in a tight fix anyhow," he thought as a shrill whistle sounded. "They'll have the house surrounded in a minute. What am I to do?"

It was a grave question.

Moving up to the ridge of the roof to be as far out of range as possible, Old King Brady looked about him.

To drop to the ground would have been madness, for the sound of horses' feet told him that already the outlaws were spreading themselves.

Just then he caught sight of the chimney.

It was one of those huge clumsy stone affairs so common in Missouri in olden times.

It was built on the outside of the building, and there seemed ample room for a man to hide in the flue.

"It's a big risk, but it's my only chance," thought the detective. "I'm going for that chimney. If they find me I'm done for, but I shall trust to luck."

He wriggled along on the shingles till he had reached the chimney.

Then rising cautiously he threw his hat down to the ground, seized one of the big flat stones from the top of the stack, and grasping this dropped into the flue.

There was no difficulty in descending. The rough stones gave ample lodgment for his feet.

After he had worked his way down a short distance, Old King Brady carefully fixed the big stone upon the projections of two of the stones set in the side of the chimney above him.

"It may save my head," he thought. "Anyhow it can't do any harm."

By this time the noise on the ground had increased.

Shouts were heard and loud commands, mingled with the trampling of horses' feet.

"Where is he? See him?" some one said.

"Naw; dogoned ef I do."

"Must be thar."

"Sartain."

"Thet you, Frank?"

"Yes."

"Whar's Jess?"

"Bringing the boy down-stairs. He says shoot the cuss without mercy. Is Pawlet dead?"

"Dead's a woodchuck."

"Lay out further, boys; lay out. You can't never see him if you keep so close into the house."

Bang! Bang!

"Thar he is."

"Where?"

"Up thar on ther roof."

"Bosh! It's only the shadow of the chimley! Hello! here's some one's big hat."

"Jess's ain't it?"

"Not much. It's New York make. Thar's Jess's over thar."

"Thet's the detective's."

"Shouldn't wonder."

"He's skipped then most likely."

"Looks so! Confound the luck; muster jumped down off ther roof while we was getting round."

All this was very pleasant for Old King Brady, who was listening intently in the chimney.

Next he heard the voice of Jesse James call out:

"Got him, boys?"

"No, brother, we hain't," replied the solemn voice of Frank.

"Flames and furies, why not? Why don't you get the ladder out of the barn and go onto the roof?"

"And be shot! Not much. However, the boys are getting the ladder all the same. Mobbe you'd like to go up."

"I will you bet."

"Say, Jess."

"What?"

"Here's his hat."

"Sure enough! Whar did you find it?"

"Here on the grass. It's my opinion he's dropped down and skipped."

"Looks that way. But we'll soon find out. Here comes the ladder."

"Say, Jess!"

"What is it, Frank?"

"Better let me go up."

"Won't do it!"

"Better."

"Shan't! You said you wouldn't onct, and now I'm going myself. You don't know this man. He's the toughest detective in the United States."

"Sure it's Old King Brady!"

"Jim Cummings was sitting right across from him in the car. He heard him tell the boy that he was Old King Brady when he accused him of being the defaulting cashier of that Kansas bank."

"Then I suppose there's no doubt about it. I think Jim orter be ashamed of himself that he didn't get the bag."

"He is, but we'll have it yet."

"Won't the boy tell you where he put it?"

"Tell you the boy's as crazy as a bug, and has a broken arm. Mother Mix swears point blank that ther wasn't no bag brought into the house, and I'm inclined to think she's telling the truth."

"Blessed be Mother Mix, I'll reward her for that," thought Old King Brady, whose ears were on the alert.

"I don't know," said Frank's voice. "Mix is a consarned old liar. What does Carrie say?"

"Says the same."

"Then I'd be more inclined to believe it. What's your idea, Jess?"

"That the boy found the bag when Jim flung him down into the creek, and hid it somewhere."

"That's mine, too."

"We'll have to make him tell where he put it, Jess."

"We'll have to bring him back to his senses first, Frank."

"Here comes the ladder! Look out there. Put it up against the window. Follow me, boys. I'm going up on the roof."

"Hold on there!" cried Jesse's voice, but it was evident that Frank had already begun to ascend the ladder which had dropped against the side of the house with a bang.

In a second the outlaws were to be heard trampling over the roof, which was flat enough to afford comfortable footing.

"No one here!" shouted Frank.

"Then he's escaped. Try the chimley, brother."

Old King Brady's heart leaped into his throat. Bang! Bang! Bang!

Three pistol shots came rattling down the flue.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MAN IN THE FLUE.

It was a lucky thing for Old King Brady that he put the big flat stone in place above him.

In all probability it was this alone that saved his life.

The instant he heard the James Boys and their gang on the roof of Mother Mix's cabin he drew in underneath it, balancing upon the stone as well as he could.

"Hello down thar!" shouted the voice of Frank James. "Are you in the flue, you infernal spy?"

Old King Brady scarcely dared to breathe.

"He ain't thar, Frank," he heard Jesse's voice say.

"Don't think he is, unless I've killed him."

"If he'd been shot he'd have sung out most likely. You're right, he jumped off the roof, and made for the woods, so scared that he never even stopped to pick up his hat."

"Fools! You think so," muttered the detective. "I'll get square with you yet for this night's work."

He heard the men descending the ladder now, and the confusion on the ground began again.

Presently the noise seemed to transfer itself to the sitting-room upon which the chimney opened.

"What yer gwine ter do with ther boy, Jess?" he heard the shrill voice of Mother Mix ask.

"None of your infernal business," growled Jesse. "Put him across the horse, boys—there, so. There's no use hanging round here after the detective no longer. He's half way to Round City by this time. Mother Mix, do you swar this young man didn't bring no black bag?"

"Swar it on my dyin' oath, Jess," croaked the crone.

"She's safe there," thought the detective, "for I believe I brought the bag into the house myself. Thank Heaven they have not found it."

"The bag never came here, that's sure," he heard Jesse say; and following close upon the remark came the question:

"Say, Mother Mix, hain't seen nothing of Jack, I s'pose?"

"Lorzee, Jess, no. Didn't I tell you last time you wuz here and stole all my chickens that Jack's dead?"

"Yes, but you're such an infernal liar."

"Nice way that to talk to a lady."

Just here Old King Brady thought he heard a groan.

It startled him not a little.

The groan seemed to come from the chimney.

"What's that?" he heard Jesse James' voice exclaim.

"It's the boy out on the horse thar," said Mother Mix. "It's nothin' short of murder to take him out to-night, sich as he is; but lorzee, you don't think no more of killin' a human critter than a dog killin' a chicken, Jesse James."

"I'll kill Jack if I ever lay eyes on him," said Jesse.

Here Old King Brady heard the groan again.

"I s'pose you will ef he don't kill you!" retorted Mrs. Mix, shrilly. "I wish you'd get out of my house, Jesse James. I want ter go ter bed sometime afore daylight anyhow."

"What do you mean, you old hag? Is Jack alive, the blame little spy?"

"No no. He's dead. I sent money over to Roadhouse ter bury him, took the last cent I had and here you've killed all my chickens——"

"Good night, mother. If the detective comes back shoot him, and I'll give you a hundred dollars next time I see you."

There was a great clatter, followed by the tramp of horses' feet.

"You will glve me a hundred dollars in a pig's rib," Old King Brady heard Mother Mix exclaim.

"Ha! Ha! Jesse James, I got the best of you that time. Ha! Ha! Ha! Carrie, gal! Whar be ye? Out in the kitchen. Here, start up that fire, I'm all tuckered out and want a cup of tea."

"Good heavens! If they're going to light a fire it's time I was getting out of the chimney," thought Old King Brady.

Right nere came the groan again. Now that all was quiet it sounded right under his feet.

"Hello!" called a faint voice. "Hev they gone?"

The voice was that of a man.

It came from below Old King Brady in the flue.

"By the powers, I ain't the only man in this chimney!" thought the detective.

"Hello!" came the faint response.

"Where are you?"

"In the chimley, right under your feet. Look out yer don't tread on me, you were standing on my head awhile back."

"Who are you?"

"Jack."

"Jack! Jack who?"

"Jack Mix."

"The fellow Jesse James is after?"

"Yes."

"Gracious! You don't say so. How long have you been in the flue?"

"Ever since you came. I know'd they'd foller you so I didn't dare come out."

Old King Brady flashed his lantern down.

Sure enough the light showed him a man's bare head right below him in the flue.

"Well, if this don't beat all!" he exclaimed, wondering mentally if he had expressed any of his thoughts about the bag aloud. Did you hear me come down the chimney?"

"Of course. You're the detective they're after."

"Yes."

"Lucky you put that stone thar. We'd hev been shot ef you hadn't. Did you hear the bullets rattle onto it?"

"Yes, of course; but look here, hadn't we better be getting out of this if your mother is going to light a fire."

"She hain't my mother—she's my grandmother."

"Well, it's all the same. We don't want to be roasted alive."

"Tain't all the same. She won't build no fire into this chimley. Wan't to get out, stranger?"

"Certainly. I'm going to climb out now."

"Don't do it."

"Why?"

"Cos I kin show you a better way. Climb down."

"But there's some fire below there; the smoke has been almost choking me."

"Oh, it don't amount to nothin'. I throwed water into it before I went up. Guess it's about out now."

"Jack!" screamed Mrs. Mix's voice up the flue just then. "Jack, you kin come down. They're all gone."

Old King Brady heard a great scrambling in the chimney below him.

Following Jack's example, he climbed down as well as he could, and presently found himself in the sitting-room gazing at an ugly, diminutive fellow with a big head, long, tangled hair, and a face black with soot.

"Lorzeel wuz you up chimley, too?" exclaimed Mother Mix, who was just coming in at the kitchen door.

"Yes," replied the detective, "I was. Mrs. Mix, you're a trump! You've earned your reward."

"I'd like for you to give it to me, then, and git out!" replied the woman, stolidly. "Betwixt you and the James Boys I've been 'bothered enough, I think."

"So you have—so you have! Here's twenty dellars more for you," replied Old King Brady, producing another gold piece from a secret pocket.

The woman's eyes glistened as she received the coin.

"I want ther terbacker, too," was all she said.

"I told you I hadn't any tobacco, but you wouldn't believe me."

"Don't believe you. That bag waz full of it. Jess' would hev got it only for me."

"Didn't I hear Jesse James tell you there was money in the bag?"

"Yes, but 'tain't so; is it stranger?"

"There is a little, perhaps. Anyhow, there is no tobacco. Hold on a moment. I'm going to get the bag."

"Whar is it?"

"Outside—among the bushes."

"Sho! you don't say. Did you throw it out the window?"

"Yes."

"Ten to one they got it, then."

Indeed, it began to look very much that way, for when Old King Brady, hurrying around to the other side of the house, began to search for the bag, he failed to find it.

Scour the bushes as he would, it was useless.

The black bag had disappeared.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIGHT IN THE FOREST.

"Hev you found the bag, stranger?" inquired Mother Mix dryly, as Old King Brady, giving up the search in despair at last returned to the house.

She had lighted a short black pipe and sat by the hearth puffing meditatively.

"No, I haven't."

"Thought you wouldn't."

"Why did you think so?"

"Cos I saw Clel Miller with a bag hitched on to his saddle which looked almighty like yours."

"Why in thunder didn't you say so then?"

"Cos you wuz so almighty sure you'd find it in the bushes."

"Zounds, woman! And here you've all ve me to waste precious moments searching for it."

"What yer mean? What be yer gwin ter do?"

"To follow the James Boys, to rescue the unfortunate young man and recover the bag."

"Guess yer won't do it?"

"Why not?"

"Cos they'll kill yer."

"I'll take my chances."

"Ye'll get left."

"No matter. That's my look-out. Have y a horse?"

"No; an' ef I had I wouldn't lend him to you; I'd never see him again."

"I'll buy him."

"Hevn't got one."

"What'll you give for a horse?" asked Jack, who without speaking had been an attentive listener to all that passed.

"Fifty dollars, and return e horse if I can."

"You kin hev one."

"Jack!" cried the hag warningly.

"Shet up, grandmother. This man means biz. Ef he'd put a ball through Jesse James' heart it would be the biggest day of my life. He shall hev one of them horses an' I'm going with him, so don't say no more."

"Jack! Jack! You shan't do it."

"Dry up!" snapped the grandson. "Come, stranger, follow me."

He opened the door of a cupboard built against the chimney and took out an old double-barreled shotgun and a powder-horn; then, without another word, led the way out of doors.

"What's yer name?" he asked as they were crossing the open space behind the house on the way to the barn.

"Brady."

"Say, Mr. Brady?"

"What is it?"

"Ef you'll kill Jesse James you kin have that horse ant and out fer nothin'."

"You seem to hate Jesse James, my friend."

"Hate him! Hate him!" exclaimed the young

man with a look of fiendish malignity. "Well, I guess yes! You bet I hate him!"

"Why?"

"Yer won't give me away?"

"Never."

"Wall, I uster be one of 'em."

"One of the James gang?"

"Yes. I've reformed."

"Indeed!"

"Yaas. Leastways I tried ter. Got converted last summer and quit the gang. Jesse swore he'd shoot me at sight, and b'gosh you kin jest believe that he means what he says every time."

"You're just the man I want, then, Jack."

"How so?"

"You will tell me where to look for the James gang."

"Thet's what I'm goin' ter do. Here's the horses now."

They had passed beyond the barn, and penetrated a short distance into the forest, coming out into a small open space, where two splendid horses stood hitched to trees.

"Hello! Where did you get these?" demanded Old King Brady, his suspicions aroused.

"They came from Illinoy."

"Did you stop to pay for them, or did you get them before you was converted?"

"None of your blame business."

"Pshaw, I was only joking," replied the detective, laughingly; but he felt confident that he had hit the truth.

"It's deg eat dog," he reflected. "This fellow has had a quarrel with the James gang and I must profit by it."

"New then, Jack," he said, aloud, "it's a hundred dollars for you if we recover that bag, two hundred if we get the bag and at the same time bag Jesse James, and fifty dollars anyhow for the loan of the horse."

"All right. Which'll you hev?"

"Either."

"On with you."

The horses were already saddled and bridled.

In another moment Old King Brady and Jack Mix went dashing past the house and had gained the wood road.

"Jack, Jack, come back!" screamed Mrs. Mix, as they passed.

"When the ducks quack," sneered the boy. "I'll be back when I've finished Jess, grandmam! Not before."

"Where are we going?" asked the detective, as they emerged into a broader and better road, still, however, taking them through the forest.

"To Big Hollow."

"Is it far?"

"'Bout three miles or three and a half."

"Shall we find the outlaws there?"

"We orter. They've got a cave thar which they sometimes hide into. Guess they won't go no further ter-night."

"How many of them do you imagine there are altogether?"

"Don't know. You seen 'em. I didn't."

"I didn't stop to count them. Fer a guess I should think there might be a dozen."

"Wall, then, there ain't no more in the cave than that. Beside you left one dead."

"No, they took him away."

"He was dead all the same though. Grandmother saw him. It wuz Eph Pawlet. He wuz a bad one, you bet."

"I didn't intend to kill him."

"You didn't, hey? Wall let me tell you stranger, that when you go out to fight the James gang you've gotter shoot to kill."

"I understand that."

"Hev you any idea how you're goin' to work to do this bizness?"

"I confess I hadn't thought much about it."

"Time you did, then. Two against a dozen

don't amount to much, specially when that dozen's the James gang."

"I understand that."

"Yer lie, yer don't. Yer don't know nothin' about it. Yer've got ter be brung right up among 'em ez I've been, to understand 'em. Now I propose to give you a point or two."

"I wish you would."

"Goin' ter. Say!"

"Say it."

"When you get ter the cave, you'll find a sentinel stationed about a hundred feet from the entrance. He'll fire one shot, and scoot."

"Well."

"Then I shall show myself."

"Well, well!"

"I shall yell out: 'Come on, boys! There's the place, Mister Dade!' And you must ride like mad, making all the noise yer can, firing four or five shots, one after another, hollerin' like a sen of a gun fer yer men to come up."

"I see. Who is Mr. Dade?"

"Sheriff of Ray county,"

"Ah!"

"Say, Mister Brady!"

"Well?"

"You know there's a reward of \$50,000 for the feller that captures Jesse dead or alive."

"I know it."

"I want half if we succeed."

"You shall have it. So far your scheme sounds well; but after all that is done what then?"

"I'll tell yer. There's two ways out of that cave."

"Yes."

"The other's near the top of the hill. That's the way they'll go out. Ten ter one Jess'll come first. He always does. You must lay for him and take him off. Then scoot. We can't do no more at the fast lick. Like enough they'll all scoot once they find Jess is dead, an' leave yer sick friend behind them. Maybe yer can git a shot at Frank."

"That's your plan, is it?" asked Old King Brady meditatively.

"That's my plan. What yer think on it?"

"As far as I can see it seems the only way. Of course, we can't hope to capture the gang. But while I am shooting Jesse, where will you be?"

"At the main entrance to the cave, ready to drop the first fellow that shows himself."

"Humph! and to leave me in the lurch if I get cornered."

"You bet."

"I like your frankness."

"Sence I got converted I always tell the truth."

"Well, we'll try it, anyhow."

"Can't do no better, no way. Mum's the word now. We'll soon be at the cave."

For a long time they rode in silence.

Jack kept a sharp lookout ahead, and seemed to be on the alert for every suspicious sound.

"Where do they keep their horses?" inquired Old King Brady, after awhile.

"In the cave. They ride right in. Quiet now. We're right into it. Thur's Big Hollow off on our left."

The forest was by no means dense. Few forests in that part of Missouri are.

Still the thick, overspreading branches of the oaks made it dark enough to almost exclude the moonlight.

As he looked forward Old King Brady could see that the land on the left hand side of the road sloped abruptly down into a deep hollow, and through the bottom of which flowed a small but rapid stream, foaming and tumbling over the rocks with a great deal of noise.

"We turn here," said Jack.

"No, you don't!" spoke a stern voice, suddenly.

Bang! Bang!

Bang! Bang!

Three men had sprung from behind a big oak and began firing at once.

At the first shot Old King Brady's horse fell dead and sent the detective tumbling into the muddy road.

"Holy Jehosphat! I'm shot!" he heard Jack Mix shout.

Then the other horse went thundering off along the road.

Old King Brady was on his feet in an instant.

Bang! Bang! went his revolver, discharged at the nearest outlaw.

The man fell with a groan.

Bang! Bang!

The shots were returned.

The detective, dodging behind a tree, escaped. Bang! Bang!

It was Old King Brady again, and the second man dropped.

Bang! Bang!

Bang! Bang!

Bang! Bang!

It was hard to tell who was firing now.

All at once Old King Brady felt a sharp stinging sensation in his shoulder and staggered back.

Somehow his legs seemed to sink from under him.

He was rolling down the hill, and he never stopped until he found himself splashing into the foaming waters of the creek.

CHAPTER IX.

WHERE IS THE BAG?

"WHERE in thunder do you suppose the feller hid the bag, Frank?"

"Blest if I know, Jess. We searched about Brandy creek in every direction, but we couldn't find the slightest trace of it. Mother Mix swears that they never brought it into her house, and the only thing that makes me suspicious that she's lying is a curious kind of look I seen in Carrie's eyes."

"Ye don't really think the old hag took it, Frank?"

"No, I don't, Jess. I don't believe it for an instant."

"We might reach the house though and make sure."

"Done already, brother. Jim Cummings an' me went through it from one end to the other, and even took up the floors, went over the barn an' sheds, but it warn't no manner of use."

"Then I 'spose that the only thing we can hope for is that the boy will regain his senses and confess," sighed Jesse.

"Zeralda, give us a little music, like a good girl, won't yer? Sing some of them Moody and Sanky tunes. I was always partial to hymn tunes. They make a man feel religious like, and this bein' Sunday 'twouldn't be right to sing nothin' too lively, yon know."

Mrs. Zeralda James laid down her book, and taking her place at the piano, began in a voice which was really very sweet and musical to sing the Sweet By and By, accompanying herself on the piano as she sang.

Now, of course, the Sweet Bye and Bye has been sung to death, and is old and stale, if ever a song was in this world.

There was one listener to the music of Mrs. Jesse James, however, upon whose ears it seemed to fall more sweetly than ever song had done before.

The scene was the prettily-furnished parlor of Jesse James, for the outlaw, weary of his reckless life for the time being, had come home to spend a week, and Frank's wife, who had been

in Kansas City, had come up to join them, and was now bustling about outside in the kitchen preparing the Sunday's tea.

Every one in town knew that the notorious outlaw brothers were there, but such was the terrorism which they exercised over the entire community at the time of which we write, that no one dared to even think of betraying them.

They were quite right too, those neighbors, viewing matters from their own standpoint.

More than one Missourian had been shot dead for attempting to betray Jesse James and his brother Frank.

Besides, those misguided people had deceived themselves into making heroes of the James Brothers.

They talked about their courage nights at the village store; about their wonderful political pull; told how they had seen Jesse walking the streets of Kansas City fearlessly, bowing to his friends right and left, among whom was included even the sheriff himself, and nobody even dared to raise a finger to bring about his arrest.

And if it was so in Kansas City—if it was true that Jesse James claimed friendship with sheriffs, legislators and Congressmen all over the State, who could wonder that he felt perfectly safe in his own town?

Why, the very dogs would have barked to give him warning of the approach of a posse.

Had he not been to church that morning with his pretty wife leaning on his arm?

Had not Frank and his wife walked close behind them?

Had not every one pressed forward to welcome that brother home after a somewhat lengthy absence?

Had not even the parson himself stopped to shake hands with him at the church door.

Indeed he had.

Strange are the ways of the Missourians of the old time stock.

Smart men! "Two of the first citizens of our State, sir," as a proud Missourian once remarked to the writer in speaking of the James Boys some years ago.

So Jesse James, in dressing-gown and slippers, leaned back comfortably in his parlor that Sunday evening never fearing betrayal, for positively there was nothing to fear.

And while Zeralda sung he listened, and that other person to whom we have alluded listened also.

It was Tom Powers, lying stretched upon a bed in a little room opening off the parlor.

He had been in the house of the James Brothers a full week now, but from the moment he lay down upon the bed in Mother Mix's hovel until now all had been a perfect blank.

As the music stole through the half-open door Tom opened his eyes wearily, with a feeling that some great weight had suddenly been taken from his brain.

Where was he? what did this mean?

The young man was wholly at a loss to imagine.

Instead of the dirty loft at Mrs. Mix's he lay on a bed as white as snow in a little room comfortably furnished.

Upon a table beside him a handsome lamp burned softly beneath a shade of rose-colored paper. There were medicine bottles standing beside the lamp, a china pitcher with water, a glass, and a bunch of rich-hued fall flowers in a pretty vase.

"We shall meet on that beautiful shore," sang the voice, and Tom raised himself up upon his arm to listen.

As he made the movement the bed creaked savagely. He heard a quick footstep cross the floor in the room without and a deep voice say:

"Hold on, Zeraldy, the boy's waked up. The

doctor said he would either have his senses when he came out of that sleep or be dyin'—one of the two."

The door was pushed open and there stood the noted outlaw, Jesse James.

It was a terrible surprise to Tom Powers.

He recognized the man at a glance by his pictures freely circulated throughout Missouri and Kansas.

For months while Tom had been cashier of the Coyote bank he had been in mortal terror lest he should raise his eyes some day from the desk and behold the very man covering him with a cocked revolver.

Was it any wonder, therefore, that he knew him now?

"Jesse James!" he ejaculated. "Jesse James! Oh, God!"

A triumphant expression covered the outlaw's face, and seemed also to spread itself to the face of the solemn Frank, who now appeared behind him at the open door.

"Well, sir, so you're awake at last," said Jesse, entering and seating himself beside the bed.

Tom stammered out something, he scarce knew what.

"I see you recognize me," said Jesse, with all the self satisfaction of a great public character.

"I do. You are Jesse James."

"I am. And you are Tom Powers, late defaulting cashier of the Coyote bank of Kansas. You choose one way to rob banks, I take another—that's all."

"I—I didn't rob the bank," faltered Tom.

"Oh, bosh! That's all rubbish," sneered Jesse. "Jim Cummings, one of my men, who happened to overhear you on the train that night, told me all about the pretty story you gave that rascally New York detective, Old King Brady. It may do for him, but it won't work with me. Now, then, I suppose you'd like to know where you are?"

"Indeed I should."

"Well, then, know it. You are in my house."

"Your house?"

"Yes."

"How came I here?"

"I brought you here."

"You!"

"Yes. I captured you at Mother Mix's cottage that night, three weeks ago."

"Three weeks!"

"Three whole weeks."

"And blamed long ones!" put in Frank from the door—"waiting for you to come to your senses and tell us what you did with your boodle in the bag."

The money—the bag!

Ah! that was what they were after then?

Tom understood it all.

He had been delirious. Well, then, he would make use of that fact.

Persons suffering from delirium sometimes lose their memory.

He would lose his—that was all.

"What do you mean?" he stammered.

"You know well enough," replied Jesse. "We have taken care of you, young man. I set your arm. My wife has nursed you through a terrible fever. But for our attention you would have died."

"And now you want your pay?"

"And now we want our pay. You are a smart, likely-looking young fellow. Join our band, become one of us. You will never regret it. Our life is one of pleasure and excitement. You'll soon be on your feet again, the doctor says, and the least return you can make us is to tell what you did with the bag which contained the money you took from the bank."

"The bag—the bag!" stammered Tom.

"Why, I threw the bag out the window, didn't I?"

"Yes, and when Jim threw you off the train, like the fool that he was, you got it again, didn't you?"

"No. I can't remember getting it!"

"What!"

"I remember nothing from that moment, gentlemen. If I did find the bag, I was unconscious at the time. Remember what I have suffered. What can you expect?"

A look of great disappointment came over the faces of the outlaws.

"Are you telling the truth?" demanded Jesse, fiercely.

"I am."

"Don't you remember being with that New York detective?"

"Certainly. He accused me on the train——"

"No, but afterward—in the woods—in Mother Mix's hut."

"No."

"But he was with you in the hut."

"What hut are you talking about?"

"He don't remember, brother, that's certain," said the long-faced Frank. "We've had our labor for our pains."

"Blame it, yes. Anyhow, I'm glad Clef Miller killed the detective."

"What, is he dead?" demanded Tom with more interest than he had yet shown.

"Yes," said Jesse. "He chased us—one of my men shot him."

Tom's heart sank.

The bag was gone and the money with it. The only man who believed in his innocence was no more. Weeks had elapsed since the affair had happened, meanwhile from one end of the country to the other he had been branded as a defaulter.

What was he to do?

If he was to return to his uncle and tell his story, he would only be arrested.

Who would believe that story now?

The agonizing thoughts which overcame the boy showed themselves in his face.

He saw in his own imagination his cousin Henry Mortyard, triumphant in his suit for Ethel's hand.

He saw himself as others must see him, a defaulter, a thief, a candidate for a felon's cell.

In his weakened state it is no wonder that these reflections got the better of him.

Tom Powers turned his face to the wall and sobbed aloud.

"What's the matter?" asked Jesse, putting his hand upon his head kindly.

"I'm ruined, that's all," groaned Tom.

"Why do you say so?"

"The money——"

"What matter. You shall be one of us, anyhow. I've taken a fancy to you, nursing you all this time. When you're able to go we'll get back to Brandy Creek and search for the bag. It may have tumbled into the stream, and have been washed further down than Frank looked. If we find it we'll divide equally. I have great hopes of you, young man. That robbery of yours was a bold one. I've long wanted a young man familiar with the banking business, of good address and gentlemanly appearance to work with me, and I'm inclined to think you'll just fill the bill. Lie still, now, and my wife will bring you some supper. I'll see you again later on."

Poor Tom!

The friendship of Jesse James was such friendship as a tiger might feel for its whelp.

But Tom was weak.

The fever had left his brain in a muddled, uncertain state.

Days went by.

Meanwhile the James family treated the boy with the greatest kindness and consideration.

Positively Tom could say with truth that he had never in all his life been with people who showed him such attention as he was receiving now.

And it had its effect.

How could it be otherwise?

Day after day Jesse and Frank talked to the young man about the pleasures of the life they were leading.

They showed him newspapers which offered rewards for his capture, which painted him in the blackest colors.

"If you attempt to go to Chicago you'll be nabbed as soon as you step off the train," said Jesse, one night. "You may as well have the game as the name, Tom. The best thing in the world you can do is to become one of us."

But though Tom was not persuaded, he nevertheless gave his consent.

"I can't help it, I've got to stay with them for the present," he said to himself. "If I attempt to escape they'll kill me. If I should succeed in escaping I'll be arrested just as they say. Perhaps I shall find the bag at the hut, perhaps Old King Brady hid it somewhere after I went off my head. Once I get it in my hands I'll return the money to Mr. Mortyard if it costs my life to do it."

It was the false reasoning of a brain weakened by sickness.

It was wrong even to think of such a thing as lending himself to the iniquitous schemes of the James Boys.

Meanwhile where was the bag?

CHAPTER X.

A NEW CLERK AT THE KNOBNOSTER BANK.

"He comes well recommended," said the president of the First National Bank of Knobnoster, Missouri, addressing the cashier. "He has shown me a letter of recommendation from Senator —. He seems to understand his business too, and while Mr. Coats, our paying teller, remains sick and confined to his home, I don't see that we can do better than to take this young man on. We can watch him, you know, and after Coats gets out again it will be an easy matter to find some place for him in the bank."

"He looks so sickly," replied the cashier, "and then his face is so brown that one would almost doubt his ever having worked indoors."

"He explains that by saying he has just come from California."

"Do you know who his face reminds me of?"

"No."

"The picture of Tom Powers, the fellow who robbed the Coyote bank out in Kansas a while back."

"Nonsense."

"Why nonsense?"

"Why, I remember the description of that young man perfectly. Blue eyes, light hair, fair complexion—"

"This young fellow has blue eyes," interrupted the cashier.

"But his hair is very dark and his skin anything but fair."

"Well, well! Of course, it's only my fancy."

"I'm satisfied it's nothing more. The letter from the senator ought to be sufficient guarantee for his honesty. We'll try him anyhow."

And try the applicant for a situation in the bank they did.

"Samuel Martin," was his name.

At least he said so.

"I'm very thankful to you, sir," he said to the president, upon leaving. "I'll go now and see about getting my bag from the station. After dinner I'll be on hand."

"Where are you stopping?" asked the president.

"At the Grand Western Hotel."

"Ah! Well, be prompt, for Mr. Handy, the cashier, wishes to run down to St. Louis for a few days to attend to some very important business, now that we've got some one to help us out. We've been in a fearful pickle since poor Coats was taken sick, and I really do hope, young man, that you thoroughly understand your work."

"You'll find I do," said Mr. Martin, as he hurriedly took his leave.

Avoiding the glances of people on the street, who of course recognized him as a new-comer at once, the young man instead of going to the depot, walked straight to the Grand Western Hotel and entered the bar-room.

There were several loungers present. One was a tall handsome looking man, who might have been put down as a successful stock raiser or something of a similar sort.

He was sitting down reading the paper when the young man entered, but upon raising his eyes and seeing him he immediately walked to the bar.

The young man lounged up to the bar, too, but did not look at the other.

"Stranger," said the possible stock-raiser, "I hate to drink alone. Won't you join me?"

"Don't mind if I do."

"What's your liquor?"

"A little drop of whisky."

"Good enough! Nothing like it. Here, you fellow with the white jacket, a drop of whisky for this gentleman, and a little gin and sugar for me."

The boy who tended bar hustled about getting the drinks.

"Did you fix it up, Tom?" inquired the stranger, in a low whisper.

"Yes."

"All O. K.?"

"I guess so."

"The letter did the biz, I suppose?"

"It certainly did. 'Any one whom Senator — recommends ought to be all right,' was the first remark the president made. How in the world did you get that letter, Captain James?"

"Sch. boy! Not so loud. I'm off my beat down in this region, and if they suspected for an instant that I was Jesse James they'd mob me quicker than scat. The letter which bothers you so I got for the asking. I went straight to the senator in Jefferson City. Jim, says I, there's a young fellow up our way what I want to get into a bank."

"But you didn't call him Jim?"

"Didn't I? What's the reason I didn't."

"Did he know you?"

"Of course he knowed me. We fought side by side against the Yanks in the old guerrilla days. He was with Quantrell, and so was I. We've knowed each other from that day out. Why he got his first nomination on the Democratic ticket through me."

Tom Powers—for the assumed Mr. Martin was none other than our hero—listened in amazement.

Yet there was no particular reason why he should be even surprised, since he had heard all this sort of thing constantly during the past few weeks.

The power of the James Boys seemed to extend in every direction, even into the Senate Chamber of the United States.

Tom had come down to Knobnoster for the express purpose of helping the James boys to rob the bank.

At least so Frank and Jesse believed.

Actually, though, Tom Powers had no intention of doing anything of the sort.

He had made up his mind to tell the president all about the scheme and of himself, as far as he dared, at the earliest opportunity, and thereby defeat Jesse's plans.

For nearly six weeks now Tom Powers had been the constant companion of the James boys. He seemed to find it impossible to shake them off.

And during this time he learned to understand something of the magnetic influence which Jesse James seemed to exert over men.

If Jesse looked at him in that peculiar way of his and ordered Tom to do a certain thing the boy instantly felt constrained to do it.

Resistance seemed almost impossible, and although Tom felt ready to kick himself two minutes after the deed was done he would act just the same next time.

Thus when Jesse, bringing round a splendid black horse one day told Tom to mount, he did so. When he directed the boy to follow him he did so: when after following him all day they met with Jim Cummings, Clel Miller and others of the gang, and Jesse introduced him as a new recruit, Tom had never a word to say.

"Maybe he was afraid?" did one hear some one say?

Well, very likely he was, but it was not altogether a feeling of fear which prevented him from declaring his sentiments outright.

He had actually got so that he loved the outlaw—loved him even while hating and despising the life he led.

If ever a man in this world understood how to win friends and to keep them, that man was Jesse James.

But Tom was sensible enough to know that the friendship of a wicked man could bring to him only ruin and disgrace.

That night the James Boys robbed a stage-coach, and during the robbery the driver, who offered some resistance, was shot dead.

The sting of conscience which Tom suffered during the next few days was horrible.

Yet he had not sufficient moral courage to resist the baneful influence of Jesse, and when the gang was chased next day by a sheriff's posse, narrowly escaping capture after a smart fight, in which several of the sheriff's men were killed, Tom found himself fighting side by side with the James Boys before he knew it, as boldly as any member of the band.

And so it went on for days and weeks.

Try as he would, Tom could not shake them off.

Meanwhile the visit to Brandy Creek had been made, and a thorough search for the missing bag instituted, but it could not be found.

Thus when the proposition for him to take a position in the Knobnoster Bank came up Tom was ready for it. He hailed it with delight.

He had expected to be sent down to Knobnoster alone with his letter, and had supposed that all he would have to do was to warn the bank officials and make his escape.

To his disappointment Jesse went with him with instructions for his brother and the rest of the gang to follow.

The first step had been taken now, and Tom trembled.

Would he be able to accomplish his plans?

The boy trembled for himself.

"This hanging up the cashier in broad daylight is getting too dangerous," Jesse said. "We want some one inside to help us. I have inquired in the matter, and I know that Mr. Ruggles, the president, goes home to dinner at three o'clock and does not return again that day. If the cashier goes to St. Louis this afternoon as you told me, it will be all right. You'll see me there at 3:30 precisely, my boy. Have the safe opened and the money exposed. I'll hang you

up, and the other clerks won't dare to say a word. As I run out you follow. There'll be a horse ready for you at the door. Leap on his back, and off you go. The boys will be on hand in case any trouble comes up."

Tom was trembling all over when he went back to the bank.

He had passed Frank James and Jim Cummings on the street, and he knew that at the slightest sign of treachery they would shoot him down without mercy.

Still he made up his mind to confess all to Mr. Ruggles as soon as he entered the bank.

Unfortunately, though, there was no opportunity.

Mr. Ruggles immediately began instructing him in his duties, and as there were several others near him all the time Tom found no chance to say a word.

"I'll wait till the cashier goes," he thought to himself.

But after Mr. Handy's departure, he found, to his disgust, that the president had gone, too, while he was busy with a customer who had appeared at the teller's window asking for the change of a hundred-dollar bill.

Tom was in agony.

It was already quarter past three.

There was no one in the bank but himself, the book-keeper, a crusty old fellow, and a boy.

Two or three times Tom was on the point of speaking to the book-keeper, but the man who had been ambitious for the teller's position himself, snapped at him so that he could not say a word.

Then he thought of running out upon the street and calling help. Indeed, he actually got as far as the door, when, to his dismay, he beheld Frank James and Jim Cummings talking horses to a crowd of men in the little square directly in front of the bank.

He hurried back to the desk again and hastily began counting a big pile of bills.

While he was thus engaged the door suddenly opened and in stalked the assumed stock raiser.

"Can you change me a fifty-dollar bill, neighbor?" he asked in a loud voice.

His eyes were upon Tom now.

Resistance was useless.

If Jesse had told him to bring out the whole contents of the safe and dump it in the street, Tom Powers would have felt obliged to obey.

"I—I guess so, sir," he stammered.

"Thank you," replied the assumed stranger.

"Young man, hold up your hands!"

Tom looked up and saw the cold muzzle of a revolver covering him.

"Holy heavens! It's the James Boys!" yelled the book-keeper dropping to the floor.

Tom's hands were up, when Frank suddenly entered and dashing behind the railing hastily swept the contents of the safe into a bag.

"Follow me!" whispered Jesse sternly, and the brothers rushed out of the bank.

"I'm lost, anyhow!" thought Tom, and he rushed after them. "I may as well be hung for an old sheep as a lamb."

The horse awaited him at the door, ready saddled.

He leaped upon its back and the stampede began.

"James Boys! James Boys!" yelled the crowd, and a few shots were fired.

Bang! bang! went Jesse's revolver.

Two men fell.

Bang! bang! echoed Frank's weapon.

Another bit the dust.

Now the crowd fell back, though the shooting continued.

The little party dashed down Main street with

their booty, and were soon riding with the speed of the wind along a country road.

CHAPTER XI.

OLD KING BRADY INTERVIEWS MR. MORTYARD.

"To what—ah—do I owe the honor of this—hum—visit?" said Mr. John Mortyard, the wealthy Chicago banker, entering the elegantly furnished parlor of his Michigan avenue mansion one evening, some days before the Knobnoster bank robbery, holding a card in his hand.

A tall, elderly gentleman, wearing a long blue coat of peculiar cut, rose and bowed profoundly.

"I wish to see you on private business, sir," he said.

"Business, Mr.—hum—Brady," said the banker, glancing at the card, "I always make it a point to transact at my—ha—at my bank!"

"Pardon me, sir, but I called at the bank, and was refused an interview."

"Indeed! My time is—hum—very much occupied. Advertising agents and—ha—canvassers—"

"Pardon me, Mr. Mortyard, but I'm neither an advertising agent nor a canvasser."

"I beg your—hum—pardon."

"My business is of an entirely different nature."

"State it, please. I will—ha—on this—hum—occasion forego my rule."

"You do well. This young lady—"

The visitor waved his hand toward a particularly pretty girl of some nineteen summers, who sat busy with her fancy work beside a table upon which burned a handsome lamp.

"Is my niece, Miss Ethel Mortyard," replied the banker, coldly. "I have no secrets from her, Mr.—hum—Mr. Brady. Proceed."

"If I am in the way, uncle, I will leave the room," said the girl, sweetly.

"I beg you will not, my dear. Come, Mr. Brady, if you have anything to say, say it. I have an—ha—an engagement, and can spare you but a few moments at the most."

"I am a detective, Mr. Mortyard," began the stranger, coolly seating himself.

"A detective?"

"Yes."

Yes, it was Old King Brady and no one else.

Well has it been remarked that the king of American detectives has as many lives as the proverbial cat.

Though seriously wounded by Clel Miller's shot in the forest that night, Old King Brady was still on deck.

Briefly he had managed to pull himself out of the creek, and after a night of dreadful agony in the forest, managed to work his way to Round City where his wound was dressed.

Here he remained for two full days, and then returned to New York.

All the way during his journey East two ideas were chasing each other through his brain.

"It was contemptible in me to desert that young man the way I did. I ought to have stood by him to the last."

This was one thought.

Was Tom Powers dead?

Had the James Boys killed him and appropriated the money which the young cashier of the Coyote Bank had made such strenuous efforts to save?

Old King Brady felt that it devolved upon him as a duty to settle these points.

Business is dull in New York. There is \$50,000 on the heads of the James Boys, beside the honor of breaking up the worst gang of outlaws of the age.

This was the second thought.

"Why should I not do it?" reflected Old King Brady.

And to make a long story short, he resolved that do it he would.

Straightening up his affairs Old King Brady hurried to Chicago.

His first act was to call upon Mr. Mortyard at the bank.

Failing to obtain an interview, he had waited until evening, and then boldly rang the banker's bell.

This is all the explanation necessary.

It fully accounts for the presence of the great detective in Mr. Mortyard's house.

"A detective!" repeated the banker, frowning. "Is this more—ha—blackmail? Is it—about—hum—my rascally nephew, Tom Powers, that you wish to see me?"

"Blackmail, Mr. Mortyard, is a hard word. It is also actionable, sir. Be sure you know of what you are talking before you accuse me."

"I—hum—beg your pardon, Mr. Brady. Proceed."

"Allow me first to ask you if you have heard anything of your nephew since he left Coyote with the funds of the bank in his possession?"

"No, sir; nor am I likely to. I have been bled right and left by the detectives—ha—by the detectives, sir. And that's all it has—hum—amounted to, or is ever likely to amount to, as far as I—ha—can see."

"Mr. Mortyard, I have later news of Tom Powers than you seem to possess."

"Is it possible?"

"It is so. Tom Powers is an innocent man."

"I knew it!" cried the girl, suddenly springing up. "I knew it, uncle! I told you so from the first!"

"Ethel," said the banker, sternly, "be good enough to hold your tongue."

The girl blushed very red and bent closer over her work without making further reply.

"Speak right out, Mr. Brady," said the banker, trembling with excitement. "If you can prove your words you shall be—ha—rewarded. I have the reputation of being—hum—a hard man, sir, but I am not. Believe me when I—ha—say—when I say that I loved Tom Powers like a son. I may have—ha—been a little—hum—hard with the boy, but I never meant it. It was all for his—ha—good—to discipline him as it were. But how, may I ask, can he be innocent when I have the most positive assurance from Henry Mortyard, my brother's son, that he—hum—robbed the—ha—hum—robbed the bank?"

"Still I repeat the statement that Tom Powers is innocent," replied the detective. "And if you will permit me, I should like to add that I believe Henry Mortyard to be a liar and a scoundrel."

"I knew it! I always said so!" exclaimed Ethel again.

"Ethel! Ethel! Will you hold your tongue?" exclaimed the banker, sternly. "Mr. Brady, you—ha—astonish me. You—hum—take my breath away, so to speak. Ethel, if you can't keep quiet, you will have to leave the room."

"Shan't do it now, uncle," replied the girl, pertly. "You ought to have taken me up when I offered to go before."

Old King Brady smiled.

"One can scarcely blame Miss Ethel for having her curiosity aroused," he said. "Listen to my story, Mr. Mortyard. After you have heard it I'm sure you will agree with me that there are good grounds for believing Tom Powers to be an innocent man."

And Old King Brady related his own part in the business, beginning with the moment he had identified Tom Powers on the Alton train.

Mr. Mortyard listened with intense interest.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed—"well, well!"

"You see, uncle," exclaimed Ethel, "I told you Tom could never be a thief."

"But it's all so amazing," said the banker. "I have always trusted Henry, but then I have trusted Tom, too."

"Was Tom in the habit of telling falsehoods. Mr. Mortyard?"

"Never, sir—never! Never knew the boy to tell a lie in his life."

"Still, without waiting for his explanation, you unhesitatingly set him down as a defaulter, and advertised him as such to the world."

"But under the—ha—circumstances how could I help it, Mr. Brady?"

"True, facts seemed to point that way. But do you believe his story as it was told me?"

"It is hard to consider my—hum—nephew Henry a scoundrel."

"One point, Mr. Mortyard. Tom Powers bought his ticket for Chicago. I know it."

"Indeed!"

"That makes it appear that it was actually his intention to bring the money to you."

"It certainly does."

"Have you had any reason to distrust Mr. Henry Mortyard since the occurrence?"

The banker glanced nervously at Ethel.

"Well, yes," he replied, "I am—ha—constrained to admit that I have. A representative of Bradstreet's commercial agency called on me—ha—called on me and told me that Henry was—hum—conducting himself improperly."

"Drinking and gambling?"

"Yes."

"That confirms your statement."

"So it does, sir—so it does."

"And what action have you taken, may I ask?"

"I was about to close the bank, sir, and abandon the field."

"Don't do it, Mr. Mortyard."

"What would you—ha—suggest?"

"That you send a detective to Coyote to investigate Mr. Henry Mortyard. If you could send him in the guise of an employe of the bank it would be well."

"Will you accept the—hum—commission, Mr. Brady?"

"Really I could not. I have promised to undertake other business."

"May I inquire if you are—ha—the famous Old King Brady?"

"I am sometimes styled Old King Brady, Mr. Mortyard."

"I—ha—I thought so. I have—hum—heard of you before, Mr. Brady. I will make it worth your while to break your engagement, sir, if you will consent to go."

"My engagement is with myself, Mr. Mortyard. I have promised myself the pleasure of hunting down the James Brothers and rescuing Tom Powers, if he is still alive and held a prisoner among them; and, furthermore, to recover the missing funds of the Coyote bank, if I can."

"You have?"

"Yes."

"I see—I see. That's of more importance. It needs all the—ha—skill of age and experience to undertake that business, while——"

"While the other place can be filled by any ordinary detective."

"Just so."

"I think that is all. I considered it proper to inform you of my intention. You must stop advertising the reward for Tom's capture."

"I will do it at once, sir. But pardon me——"

"Well, sir?"

"Do wish any—ha—money to begin your undertaking?"

"Money! Bless you, no, sir. I have more money than I know what to do with."

"Indeed! You are fortunate. Nevertheless,

let me say that if you succeed there will be a reward."

"We will talk of that some other time."

"But I will insist."

"No matter. Good-evening, Mr. Mortyard."

"Good-evening, good-evening. I shall hear from you?"

"Rest assured of it."

"And I," exclaimed Ethel, springing up and seizing the old detective's hand, "wish you success with all my heart."

"With your good wishes to help me along success must come," said the old detective.

And bowing gallantly he left the house.

CHAPTER XII.

A DESPERATE ENCOUNTER

"RIDE! Ride for your life, boy!" cried Jesse James putting spurs to Siroc, the noble Arabian steed which for years had carried its owner over hill and plain.

"Are they after us?" panted Tom.

"Bet your life," put in the solemn Frank. "I saw the sheriff on the street making for Kennedy's livery stable just as I fired that last shot."

"But how can you be sure he's following us?"

"Listen!" said Jesse holding up his hand, "can't you hear them?"

"No."

"Listen again."

"I can hear nothing but the noise of our horses' feet and the echo."

"Echo! How can there be an echo in an open country like this?"

"That's true. Then what I took to be the echo is——"

"Nothing less than the noise of the horses following. That's it."

"How far behind do you suppose they are?"

"Two or three miles, I should say. Look behind you—you can judge for yourself."

They had reached the top of the hill now.

Before them lay a forest, while behind extended a long stretch of cultivated country with the spires of Knobnoster in the dim distance.

"How can I see them?"

"Look! look!"

"I am looking. I can't see anything."

"Don't you see a cloud of dust back there a piece?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"I understand. It is the dust raised by their horses."

"Precisely."

"They can see us in the same way?"

"Of course."

"Is there no way of throwing them off the scent?"

"Not just yet. There will be presently."

"What is it?"

"You shall see."

They thundered down the opposite slope of the hill like the wind.

Passing a farm-house which stood at the edge of the forest, three dogs rushed out barking furiously.

Bang! Bang! Bang! went Jesse's revolver.

"Hey! Ill! Consarn ye! What the mischief you doin' that for!" yelled a man, in his shirt-sleeves, rising up from behind a fence.

Bang! Bang! went Frank's pistol.

"Oh, Lord, I'm shot! I'm killed dead!" roared the man, running toward the house, as the gang thundered by.

"What did you do that for?" asked Tom, horror-stricken at this cold-blooded act.

"What?"

"Shoot that man, though of course it was Frank who did it."

"To keep him from watching us," drawled Frank, "but I didn't shoot him. I fired over his head."

"Sure."

"I never miss when I draw a bead, young fellow. That man was only scared. He wasn't hurt."

"But the dogs?"

"Were shot to prevent their barking, from giving the sheriff and his friends a clew to our movements," replied Jesse, as they gained the bottom of the hill.

Now they were in the forest, and right before them was a bridge crossing a little creek.

"Shall we ride up the creek hyar, Capten Jess?" inquired Jim Cummings.

"No. We'll take the next one. That old cuss of a farmer may give the sheriff the steer in spite of Frank's shot."

"But how do you know there will be another?" asked Tom. "I thought you told me you were out of your beat in this part of the country?"

"I did, and it's true to a certain extent. Nevertheless, I may say that I know every foot of Missouri as no other man in the State knows it or ever can know it. But look here, Tom."

"What?"

"You played your part nobly. Didn't he, Frank?"

"Bully," said Frank.

"Any idea how much we got?" inquired Jesse.

"The president of the bank told me that there was \$15,000 in the safe."

"Then that's what we got," said Frank.

"No, you didn't. There was at least \$2,000 lying on my desk."

"Which, of course, you pocketed?"

"No, I didn't."

"Why the mischief didn't you?"

"I was so confused that——"

"Oh, he'll learn in time," said Jesse. "You can't expect the boy to be up to his business all at once, brother. He was no doubt confused."

"Upon my word I could hardly believe you weren't in earnest, you did it so naturally," laughed Tom, who thought it best to make a show of good humor.

"Oh, I'm an old hand at this business, but look here, Frank, we've got to get off the line of these telegraph wires or we'll be in a hot box before we know it."

Tom wondered why.

He was soon to learn.

"Orter done it before," growled Frank. "I told you to ride up the first creek you came to, Jess, and you didn't. Now we've got to take our chances."

"Oh, it will be all right, I guess. We'll come to another creek before long."

"I ain't so sure. Hark!"

A rattling sound could be heard behind them at some distance away.

"There they go, over the bridge!" cried Jesse. "By thunder, Frank, you was right. We orter gone up that creek."

"What's the matter with the telegraph wires?" asked Tom.

He had his answer immediately, but it did not come from Jesse James.

"Stop, there!" shouted a loud voice ahead of them. "Halt, or you are dead men!"

It was getting dark, but there was still light enough to see a band of six or seven determined individuals guarding a bridge just ahead of them with long-barreled rifles clutched in their hands.

"It's Jack Dade, sheriff of Ray county!" exclaimed Jesse. "He must have been in Montserrat when they telegraphed from Knobnoster for a party to head us off. Frank, we've got to kill that man. He's sure to earn the reward."

"May as well do it now then," growled Frank.

Meanwhile all were dashing straight ahead, apparently unmindful of the obstruction.

"Is it a rush, or shall we stand?" asked Clel Miller.

"A rush, of course," replied Jesse. "What would we stand for? To have those Knobnoster fellows come up behind us? Now, then, boys! Now! Now!"

He put spurs to Sirio and dashed on toward the bridge.

Bang! Bang!

Bang! Bang!

Bang! Bang!

Bang! Bang!

Tom never knew the number of shots fired.

He knew that he fired with the rest—that the bullets went whistling around him.

The cries and general uproar was tremendous.

Suddenly our hero felt the horse which he rode sinking beneath him, and realizing that the beast had been shot, he gave one leap and landed in the underbrush by the side of the road, just in time to avoid being crushed to death.

"Down with the James Boys! Down with them!" a man who dashed past was roaring.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The shooting had begun again; this time on ahead.

Tom lay motionless in the gathering shadows.

It occurred to him that here was a capital opportunity to escape.

Presently more shots and the rattle of horses' hoofs was heard, and another party of mounted men went dashing by.

They were undoubtedly the sheriff of Knobnoster and his band.

Tom waited until the noise had pretty well died away in the distance, and then, rising to his feet, plunged into the thickest of the forest and ran like a deer.

"God grant I may never see them again," he murmured. "I'd sooner be dead than to lead the life I've been leading for the past six weeks."

Just then a sudden weakness seemed to assail him. There was a stinging sensation in his side, and the report of a pistol rang out among the trees.

Tom sank to the ground.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LINIMENT MAN.

"HERE you are, ladies, and gentlemen—here you are! Briggs' only genuine Rooshun liniment! Good for lumbago, sprains or burns, gunshot wounds, broken hearts and broken backs! Cures every ill that flesh is heir to! Has been used as a charm to ward off the bullets of the James Boys! Here you are! Here you are! Who'll buy the next bottle at the ridiculously low price of ten cents?"

The scene was the little square in the town of Knobnoster, Missouri.

The time was the evening of the James Boys' bold robbery of the bank.

A tall, shabbily-dressed man, wearing a long white beard, with his eyes concealed behind a pair of green spectacles, has come out into the center of the open space, and, setting up a little three-legged stand, had fixed a tall naphtha torch in the ground beside it, which was now blazing away like a house afire, shedding its fitful light upon a crowd of men and boys with long hair and big boots, who stood listening to him with open mouths.

"Will it cure the spine of my back, think?" inquired a big, hulking fellow who seemed to have dropped in from the rural districts. "Jesse James left a bullet thar three years back, an' it's been botherin' me ever sence."

He was perfectly serious, so much so that the crowd laughed heartily.

"Better send a bottle over to old man Rugles," suggested some one.

"Yaas, ef it cures broken banks as well as broken backs!" called out some one else, and the laugh went up again.

"Come here," said the fakir. "Let's look at your back, my man."

The fellow, without the slightest hesitation, elbowed his way through the crowd and threw aside his coat, after which he pulled up his shirt just as though there had been no one present, displaying his naked back to that part of the crowd which stood in the rear of the stand.

A perfect roar of laughter went up.

"Gentlemen," called out the fakir mockingly, "His back is broad. Let us hope that it does bear a multitude of sins."

"What yer laughing at?" growled the man. "Guess ef you fellers hed one of Jess James' bullets in his back you'd want ter be doctored tew."

Cries of "That's so! Never mind 'em, Ike Mosely. Ef it cures you, we'll all buy."

"And I guarantee a cure!" shouted the liniment man. "Watch him, gentlemen. Judge for yourselves."

He pulled out the cork from one of the bottles, and pouring a portion of its contents upon a piece of flannel, began to rub the fellow's back briskly.

The flannel warmed the flesh and soothed it; the liniment—a well-known prescription more than half laudanum, served to deaden the pain for the moment, and in a few moments a look of indescribable relief came over the man's face.

"How do you feel now, my friend?" inquired the fakir.

"I'll be dogoned ef I don't feel better."

"Gentlemen," roared the fakir, "he says he feels better. What did I tell you? Briggs' liniment is a sure cure for bullets whether shot by the James' Boys, the Younger Boys, or any other gang of jolly boys in Missouri. Who'll buy the next bottle. Only ten cents!"

Several pressed forward, and passing up dimes received their bottles in exchange.

Meanwhile, the big patient was adjusting his shirt as calmly as if he had been in the privacy of his own bedroom.

"Gentlemen!" bawled the liniment man, "let the example of our broad-beamed—no, I mean broad-backed—friend here be a warning to you. Heed it, my friends, heed it. Try Briggs' only genuine California liniment and you'll buy it. Only ten cents, gentlemen, only ten cents. An agency to be established at Seltzer's drug-store, where it cannot be purchased at less than twenty-five cents the bottle after I've left town."

Dozens of bottles were flying over the three-legged table by this time, and a harvest of dimes dropped into the fakir's box in return.

"Herc, neighbor!" cried the liniment man, "I'll be liberal. Here's three bottles to take home and use on your family and the horses, the cows, the dog, the cat, the hens—it's warranted to make them lay—the poll parrot, if you've got one, and the woodchuck under the barn."

Then stooping down to hand the man the bottles, he whispered:

"Meet me at the Grand Western in half an hour. You shall have all the whisky you want. I've something to say to you."

Promptly at the expiration of half an hour the fakir closed his shop and retreated to the hotel.

His patient was waiting for him, and the first greeting was an invitation to the bar.

The drink imbibed, the fakir led his patient to a seat in the corner, and offered him a cigar.

"Look here, friend, when did you receive that wound?"

"About a year back."

"Did Jesse James really shoot you?"

"You bet."

"How did it happen?"

"He robbed a bank up in my town. I was one of those who was fool enough to try to stop him."

"Of course you'd like to get square?"

"You bet."

"Do you know the country round here?"

"Every foot of it."

"Was you in town yesterday when the bank robbery took place?"

"No."

"Was it really the James boys who did it?"

"Sartin! A dozen seen 'em."

"Before the robbery?"

"Yes, an' after."

"Why did they not try to arrest them before hand?"

"Arrest 'em?"

"That's what I said."

"Wa'al, now, stranger, I want you to understand that it's undertakin' a big contract to try an' arrest Jesse James."

"Seems to me you Missourians are a lot of cowards."

"No, we ain't. Guess yer a blasted Yank."

"No, no, but why do you let the James Boys ride over you the way you do?"

"Waal, we ortener, that's a fact; but Jess is thought a heap of round here. Fact is, he's got friends everywhere. I thought a heap of him myself till he shot me. Now I'd like to wring his blasted neck!"

"You are in earnest?"

"I'll swar it ef necessary; but say, stranger, who be you? A detective?"

"Yes."

"I guessed it."

"You won't give me away?"

"Never. My back hain't felt so easy in months. Say, that's mighty good liquor they keep here—don't yer think so?"

"I agree with you. Let's have another drink."

After the second dose was partaken of the conversation in the corner began again.

"How would you like to help me catch the James Boys?" asked the detective.

"No, thank you, none on my plate. I've had my dose."

"No, but you don't understand me. There'll be no risk."

"There wouldn't, hey? Why, Jesse James has run down and shot every man who ever tried to go agin him. I'd rather not."

"But all I ask you to do is to point out a road to me."

"Oh, that's different. Spit it out."

"This morning while I was coming along to the train I overheard two men talking."

"Yaas?"

"Yes. They were two who had formed part of the sheriff's posse which went out yesterday to hunt the James Boys."

"Yaas."

"They seemed to be their friends, for I heard one of them say they were glad the brothers were not caught."

"Shouldn't wonder a mite."

"They had separated themselves from the others, and had pushed through the woods to Montserrat, where they remained all night."

"I reckon I know which way they went," says one—they were telling their story to a third who seemed also to be a friend of the James Boys.

"Where's that?" asked this man.

"You know the old Talmage Place?"

"Yes," was the reply.

"Waal, thar," said the man.

"Why thar?" asked the other.

"Coz the James Boys hev stopped thar before," said the man, "an' last night ez Jim an' me came past it we seen lights movin' about inside. If it wuzn't them who was it? That's all I heard."

"Ghosts!" said the detective's listener solemnly. "Ghosts."

"What do you mean?"

"Mean jest what I say. The old Talmage House is haunted. I've seen them lights myself many a time."

"But where is this house?"

"Back a matter of ten miles, right in ther woods off ther Montserrat road."

"Will you guide me there to-night?"

"What fer?"

"James Boys."

"G'long. Ef they wuz thar they'd kill yer, but they ain't."

"Wil. you do it for ten dollars?"

"Yer won't ask me to go in?"

"No, no."

"Then I'll do it, but mind, I'm off ez soon as I've showed ye ther house."

"That's agreed on."

"O K. Whar's the cash."

"Here."

A ten-dollar gold piece changed hands.

"When do we start?"

"Now, if you're ready."

"I'm ready any time. How yer goin'?"

"I suppose we'd better hire horses?"

"Ye can ride in my wagon ef ye like, I live over to Montserrat."

"Good."

"Shall we go now?"

"As soon as possible."

Together they left the hotel.

CHAPTER XIV.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

THE wind howling among the tree-tops, the rain beating down upon the forest and splashing in great drops, with a cool refreshing sensation upon an aching head.

This was what Tom Powers heard and felt when next his senses returned to him.

He was lying upon the ground in a pool of water, with fierce, knife-like pains shooting through every bone in his body, drenched to the skin.

What had happened?

It took Tom some time to realize.

All he could remember was hearing as he fell the sound of a horseman galloping along the road.

Had this been a stray member of the sheriff's posse who had shot him?

It seemed probable.

But where was the wound?

Stiffness and pain in the region of the left hip seemed to answer his question as he tried to rise.

He managed to get on his feet at last, but only with great difficulty.

His head throbbed wildly. He seemed so weak that he could scarcely stand.

"These, then, are some of the pleasures of an outlaw's life," he thought bitterly.

"Well, it serves me right. I have acted like a coward. I could have prevented this if I had only tried."

He leaned against a tree and tried to think.

Something must be done, or he would perish; but what?

To find the road was clearly the first step, but then?

There lay the difficulty.

To return to Knobnoster would be madness. To pass on to Montserrat equally so.

Beside, even were he to succeed in entering the latter town unmolested, what could he do?

He had no money—not a cent. Jesse James had taken care of that.

Of course, then he could not take the train, and to ask for shelter would only be to expose himself to arrest, for doubtless some of the sheriff's people were still hanging about the town.

"I'll stop at the first farmhouse I come to," he resolved. "Thank heavens! I've got rid of the James Boys, anyhow. I'll try and muster strength to push on, and I guess I can."

But he found it very difficult.

His left leg was so stiff that he could scarcely move it at all, and the pain which each step brought with it was frightful.

The marshy ground beneath his feet made matters worse.

On, and still on he went, but somehow he did not seem to reach the road.

"There's something out of geer," he muttered, at last, pausing beneath a big tree. "I must be going in the wrong direction. When I fell I was only a few steps from the road, and it's not likely I moved after I went down."

He turned to retrace his steps, but before he had gone far he heard a noise behind him which made him alter his mind.

"Gee! Haw! Git up, consarn ye!" a voice was shouting. "Ye blamed critters, I'll break yer backs fer ye, ef ye don't pull the wagon out'n this mud."

"Hello! The road is that way after all," thought Tom. "I'll hurry back. Perhaps I can get a ride."

The thought spurred his failing steps, and, turning, he went stumbling on.

Meanwhile the grinding of heavy wheels was heard, followed presently by a loud crash and a string of imprecations so horrible as to make your hair fairly stand on end.

"Phew! That fellow's no church member anyhow," he muttered. "But where is he?"

Just then a light broke among the trees.

Pushing on Tom came suddenly out upon what appeared to be an old wood road.

Just behind him was a large wagon drawn by two oxen, the wheels of which had sunk knee-deep in the mud, throwing the wagon partly over to one side, which had caused a heavy packing-case to tumble off into the road.

"Whoa! Gee! Haw! Ye infernal crooked-horned gophers!" yelled the driver, who from the way he went mumbling about himself seemed to be slightly the worse for wear.

"Gee! Haw! Back! Git up! Whoa! Stand still, or I'll break your infernal blasted necks!"

Tom leaned against a tree and laughed till the tears came.

It was as good as a play to watch the man's manenvers by the light of the lantern which hung under the wagon.

He pulled this way and hanled that, until at last he had the poor oxen so confused with his contradictory orders, that they seemed perfectly dazed and helpless and refused to budge a step.

Tom pressed forward, still laughing at the scene.

The man was a typical Missourian of the big-featured, tobacco-chewing, big-booted type.

His age must have been well on toward forty, and the only thing in which he differed from his neighbors was in the quality of his clothes, which, though old and much worn, were nevertheless of stylish make and good cloth, totally different from the ordinary ready-made clothing sold in the country stores throughout the State. Another point Tom noticed—his hair was cut close.

All this Tom Powers observed and wondered at.

He was to learn the reason by and by.

Just then the man caught sight of him.

He gave a quick exclamation, whipped out an immense horse pistol, which must have done duty as far back as the Mexican war, and came rushing toward him, bellowing like a bull.

"Who be ye, consarn ye? None of yer dog-oned funny biz with me now! I'm a rip-roarer, I am! I'm a toughy from Oshkosh, I am! Dog-on yer sniveling soul, if ye've got one, if ye don't mizzle I'll blow ye ter Kingdom-come!"

He was a ferocious object to look at as he came rushing toward poor Tom flourishing his pistol.

Fortunately our hero remembered the old saying about barking dogs, and stood his ground.

"What are you making all that row about?" he said quietly.

"'Bout you, consarn ye."

"What about me?"

"Yer one of ther James Boys, ain't yer?"

"No."

"The deuce ye ain't. I think yer are."

"Think what you like. I am one of those who chased the James Boys from Knobnoster. They robbed the bank down there this afternoon."

"Sho!"

"Yes."

"How much did they git?"

"Well, I asked Jesse James to stop and let me count it," replied Tom, gravely, "but he didn't seem quite willing."

"You axed him to let you count it?" drawled the teamster, whose head seemed as thick as the skulls of his oxen.

"Oh, you're dull! How the mischief should I know what they took?"

"True, how should you? But looker here, stranger, you may call me dull, but I'm sharp enough for one thing."

"What's that?"

"To see that you're a Yank. You don't belong in Knobnoster, nohow. Nor, fer thet matter in old Missouri at all."

"Sure?"

"Sartin."

"What makes you so sure?"

"Your talk."

"Well, I'll tell you something since you are so sharp."

"What is it?"

"Yon have lived among Yanks. It's my opinion you've jest come out of——"

Bang!

Before Tom had time to finish the sentence the horse-pistol was discharged and a bullet went clipping through the trees somewhere above his head.

Tom was startled, but he did not budge.

He knew he was in danger, for he had already discovered that he was without a weapon.

What had become of his pistol he could not tell. Perhaps he had dropped it when his horse went down.

"What did yon do that for?" he asked as coolly as he could.

"Say that again and I'll shoot straighter next time," growled the man, glaring at him fiercely.

But as Tom had put his hand on his hip-pocket, the man seemed just a bit alarmed, and kept back near his team.

"You better not try it," said Tom. "I've been wounded already by the James Boys, and I warn you—I'm a desperate man."

"Don't care; so'm I!" growled the teamster. "James Boys about! Holy snakes! what d'yo mean by sayin' I'd jist got ont?"

"Just come ont of Illinols was what I meant to say," replied Tom.

"Do you take me for a Sucker?" (name for residents of Illinois) roared the teamster. "I'll

let you know I'm a Missourian, I am—full-blooded from my ears to my toe-nails, and I kin chaw up ten little sniveling Yanks like you!"

"Oh, bother! What a fuss you're making!" said Tom, coming forward, for he had begun to suspect that the fellow was a coward.

"What do you want to threaten a wounded man for?" he said. "If you had a spark of humanity about you you'd offer to help me out of my fix."

"Wall, I guess I'm ez human ez the next one," growled the man. "Yer ain't in a wuss fix nor I be."

"Are you shot?"

"No, I ain't shot, but my team is stuck in the mud and I've lost me load."

"What is your load?"

"None of your dogoned bizness."

"I only asked because I was going to tell you how you could get it on."

"How?"

"Will you give me a ride to the next town if I do?"

"What town do you suppose I am going to?"

"Montserrat. I want to go to a doctor's as soon as I can."

The teamster chuckled.

"You can ride," he said, briefly.

"Thank you. I was going to suggest that you cut down a lot of boughs and throw them in the road. That will give your oxen a footing and they will be able to pull the wagon out of that hole."

"Huh! I wuz jest gwine ter do that when you came a bothering me."

"Then cut two saplings and make a pair of skids," continued Tom without heeding the interruption, "by their help I guess we can manage to get the box on the cart together. I've still got some strength left."

"Pooh! I thought of that myself," grumbled the teamster. "Wuz gwine ter do it soon ez ever I got the wagon out."

"Well, if you don't begin soon you'll never finish the job. Got a knife?"

"Yaas. Hev' you?"

"Yes. Let's cut the boughs first."

Both went at it, working as rapidly as possible.

In less than half an hour they had the team up out of the hole, and were ready to begin at the big case.

It was tremendously heavy and seemed to contain a piece of machinery of some sort.

It bore no marks of any sort.

Tom could not help wondering what it was, and why this man was taking it through the woods in the dead of night.

He had shrewdly guessed by this time that the road upon which they were was not the high road from Knobnoster to Montserrat, which follows the line of the Missouri Pacific railway, but simply a cross-road through the woods.

Still he hoped by following it to reach some farmhouse, and then it was his intention to abandon the team, and claim the rest and shelter of which he stood so greatly in need.

They had a hard tussle with the case, and it strained poor Tom terribly.

By the time they got it on, he felt ready to drop.

"I'll sit on the box," he said, climbing into the wagon.

"No, you won't!" growled the teamster.

"Why not?"

"Coz I don't choose to hev ye. Sit on the seat. I'm a-gwine ter walk with the team."

To humor him Tom obeyed.

Pitching and rocking the heavy wagon moved unsteadily forward, grinding over stumps and stones, sinking in the mud, lurching this way and that.

Still the forest continued.

It seemed fairly interminable.

After half an hour there was still no sign of civilization, and poor Tom began to give up in despair.

He seemed to be growing weaker and weaker, and felt that he could stand it no longer.

Meanwhile the teamster had lapsed into comparative silence, speaking only to his oxen.

He would not even reply to Tom's occasional remarks.

As they advanced he kept looking to the right and left sharply, as if studying the landmarks.

Evidently he was not familiar with the road and wished to make sure of where he was.

"How are we getting along?" asked Tom at last.

"Can't yer see fer yerself?" growled the man.

"Are we most to Montserrat?"

"I expect so."

Here he seemed to give a start.

There was a light shining ahead through the trees.

"Look here!" he shouted, "I thought I heard some one coming. Mebbe it's the James Boys. Git off and look back a piece, will you?"

Tom obeyed.

To keep in the man's good graces seemed his only salvation.

He had scarcely taken a dozen steps, when there came a loud report, and a bullet went whistling past his head.

It did not hit him, but at the same moment his foot caught in the root of a tree, and he pitched forward into the mud.

"That settles him, ther blamed spy," he heard the teamster say. "Gee! haw! get on there, consarn ye!"

He punched up the oxen with his goad stick and the wagon went rumbling on.

Poor Tom!

He was in a sorry fix now.

Though escaping the bullet of the treacherous teamster, he had struck his head upon a tree-trunk, for the moment completely stunning him.

For some little time he lay unconscious in the muddy road.

When his senses returned he found himself almost helpless.

It was pitch dark and the rain was pouring heavily.

Even the light which he had caught sight of among the trees seemed to have vanished, and when he rose to his feet he found his head reeling so that he could scarcely stand.

"What shall I do? Oh, what shall I do?" he murmured aloud.

But the team had vanished, there was no one to hear his voice.

He staggered forward blindly for a few steps, fell, recovered himself, and then fell again.

Everything seemed to be swimming about him.

He tried to gain his feet once more, but could not.

Then it was that he raised his voice for the last time in one despairing cry for help.

Was help at hand?

Surely he could hear some one calling.

He tried to answer, but now his voice utterly failed him.

He closed his eyes, but presently opened them again.

How long a time had elapsed he could not have told.

"What's the matter? Are you badly hurt?" a sweet voice was saying.

There was a young girl bending over him, eyeing him pityingly by the light of a lantern which she held up to his face.

Tom tried to answer, but it was of no use.

Then his senses seemed to flit away again and he knew no more.

CHAPTER XV.

OLD KING BRADY STARTS ON THE TRAIL.

"HAVE we much further to go?"

"Dunno. Guess not."

"How much further do you think?"

"Waal, we've got ter git to ther cross road, I guess. Ye can't expect me to drive my wagon through ther woods."

"Hardly."

"One would think so, then. Ye've done nothing but fuss about it fer a mile back."

"I'm auxious."

"Ye'll git over yer anxiety, I reckon, when Jess James puts a bullet inter yer hide, and thet's jest what he'll do if he's in ther old Talmage house as you think."

"My hide is tough. I've been shot at by the James Boys before now."

"Sho! yer don't say so."

"It's true."

"What's yer name?"

"Smith."

"Yer lying, doctor."

And so he was, if one can term the innocent deception a lie, for the detective, who under the guise of a medicine fakir, had picked up the lout Missouriian at Knobnoster, was Old King Brady and no one else.

Upon leaving Mr. Mortyard, Old King Brady had proceeded straight to Kansas City and spent several days in interviewing various persons concerning the James Boys and their haunts.

It amounted to but little.

The James Brothers, according to all accounts, seemed to be here, there, and everywhere.

Though usually confining their nefarious operations to Missouri, they were liable to be heard from in Kansas, Texas, or indeed anywhere else.

Then came the news of the Knobnoster bank robbery flashing over the wires, and Old King Brady, disguised as the liniment man, hurried to that town.

Now he felt that he had fairly started on the trail of the James boys.

Where it would lead him no man living could predict, but dead detectives by the dozen, if they could have spoken from the graves to which the outlaws had sent them, might have raised their bony fingers warningly and bade him beware.

"But they," Old King Brady would have replied, "were not New Yorkers. Let the West brag as it may, they stand in deadly terror of the James boys in Missouri, but New York detectives don't scare for a cent."

"Tut—tut! don't tell me I lie," replied the old detective, coolly. "It might not be healthy for you to repeat that."

"Waal, Smith's everybuddy's name and no-buddy's," growled the Missouriian.

"Well, what's your name? If you have told me I've forgotten."

"Ed Windless."

"Well!"

"Now come, none of that! That joke's played. I hain't ready to be a windless in a welljest yet."

"Really no joke was intended."

"But all the same it's been cracked before. Say, Smith!"

"What is it?"

"Thar's a cross-road on ahead thar on the right."

"I don't see any opening. The forest seems just as thick as ever."

"You'll see it when we git thar. G'lang, Napoleon! Thar—now, then, here we go!"

The wagon turned abruptly in among the trees,

following a trail which certainly presented anything but a promising appearance.

"Hold on a moment, Mr. Windless!" exclaimed the detective.

"What's ther matter?"

"I want to get out. Stop the horse!"

Windless reined in and Old King Brady jumped out.

Producing his pocket lantern he stooped down and examined the road attentively.

"Waal!" questioned the Missourian. "What yer see?"

"Tracks."

"Hah!"

"Several mounted men have ridden in here recently."

"Sho!"

"Probably they were the James Boys."

"Shouldn't wonder a mite," exclaimed the fellow, in evident alarm. "Gosh! ye don't get me to go no further ef that's so."

"You'll take me to the Talmage house according to agreement."

"No, I won't nuther. I only agreed to show you ther road."

"There are other tracks here," added Old King Brady, continuing his investigations.

"What kind?"

"Looks as though an ox team had gone through."

"Impossible!"

"Why impossible?"

"Because thet road don't lead nowhere except to the Talmage house."

"Well, and what then?"

"What would an ox team be goin' to ther Talmage house fer, I'd like ter know? You bet Jess James don't travel in ox carts, nohow."

"Nevertheless the ox team went through here," the detective persisted, "and what is more it was heavily loaded, too."

"You must be mistaken."

"I ain't mistaken. Get down and see for yourself."

"No, thank yer. I'm ez comfortable ez I can be in this blarsted rain where I be; I hain't goin' ter get out in ther mud."

"Well, then I'll get in and you shall start on."

"You kin get in ef yer want, but I'm going back."

He gave the rein a pull as he spoke to turn the horse around.

"Hold on!" cried Old King Brady.

"Won't do it."

"Stop!"

"Go ter pot."

"Thank you. I prefer to go to the Talmage house. Hold on, I say."

"Shan't. I'm goin' ter Montserrat."

"Look at me!" cried Old King Brady, suddenly, for the attention of Mr. Windless was wholly devoted to his horses, which had begun to back.

He looked up to catch a glimpse of a cocked revolver leveled at his head.

"Dogon, ye, take thet thing away?" he cried, in terror. "What are ye about?"

"About to shoot you if you don't instantly bring the horse into the road again," replied the detective, coolly.

"I won't."

"Oh, yes, you will. One, two——"

"Hold up! You've got the drop onto me, mister. I'll cave."

"You'd better."

"Why don't you take away ther shootin' iron?"

"Because I want you to throw down your revolver and knife first."

"Gorsh! Di ye think I'd shoot yer?"

"Well, I don't care to take any chances with a man who was once the friend of Jesse James."

Windless groaned.

Reluctantly he drew out a bowie knife and an ancient-looking pepper pot of the old Colt pattern and flung them out into the road.

"Can't I hev them back again?" he whined. "Them cost good money. I don't want to lose 'em so."

"You shall have them in due time," replied Old King Brady picking up the weapons. "Got any more?"

"Not a dogoned thing."

"Look out you don't prove yourself a liar, for if you do I'll shoot you without mercy. Drive on now and keep as quiet as you can."

He leaped into the wagon, which was presently wabbling along over the rough road.

"Guess you think yer pritty smart," growled Windless. "I wouldn't tech ye nohow."

"I don't propose to trust you or any other Missourian."

"Thet's blamed hard, mister."

"As you say, I've had my medicine."

"Waal, you're a rum un. Of course yer a Yank."

"On the contrary, I'm an Irishman."

"Sho, yer don't say sol Irish! Wa'al I'll be dogoned!"

"What's the matter?"

"The idee of an Irishman ketching the James Boys strikes me ez kinder comical, that's all."

"You seem to have a low opinion of my countrymen."

"Hain't no opinion of 'em at all. Why should I? I'm a Missourian and a gentleman. Irish! huh!"

Old King Brady did something of which he was seldom guilty—actually laughed aloud.

"Well, you are an amusing people, anyway," he said. "Now I suppose you call Jesse James and his brother Frank gentlemen?"

"Of course. The Jameses is one of the first families of our State, sir."

"I thought so. Lord deliver me from the seconds and the thirds, then. But enough of personalities. How much further have we got to go?"

"I s'pose we shell keep agoin' till Jess shoots us, now thet you've got ther drop on me," grumbled Windless.

"Come, friend, no nonsense. Answer my question."

"'Bout half er mile, I reckon."

Just then they came to a place where boughs had been thrown down in the mud for some distance along the road.

"The ox team got stuck here," remarked Old King Brady.

"Looks so, don't it?"

"It is so. And see, the load went off in the mud, there. It seems to have been a heavy box of some sort."

"I can't understand it," said Windless. "I see now that you must be right, but what in tarnation the James Boys want to drive an ox-team inter ther woods for beats me."

They pushed on, coming out at last upon a small clearing, where the road came to an abrupt end.

Windless reined in his horses.

Before them, standing alone in the midst of the clearing, was a large, square house of antique and weatherbeaten appearance, which seemed to be well on the road to decay.

It was built of rough boards, which had at one time been painted red, now changed by the action of time into a reddish brown. The roof was shingled, steep and moss-grown; the windows were concealed behind heavy wooden shutters, through the cracks of which not a glimmer of light could be seen.

In front of the house stood a huge oak tree, whose years must have numbered more than a century, with wide spreading branches sweeping

the roof, making, as they creaked across the shingles, a most doleful sound.

Windless shuddered.

"Thar ye be," he whispered. "Thet thar's the Talmage place. S'pose I kin go now, sure?"

"Yes, in a moment. What do you know of that house?"

"Mighty little."

"How long has it been deserted?"

"Longer than I kin remember. I've hearn my father tell how t'was built by a man named Talmage away back in the forties. He murdered his wife in ther cellar. Hold on, I'm wrong. T'was his wife who murdered him in the garret, an' chopped his body up inter little pieces, and roasted 'em in ther cook stove. After that the Talmage folks moved away."

"About time, I should think. What a cheerful people you Missourians seem to be anyway! House been deserted ever since, I suppose?"

"Ever sence, except fer the James Boys. They've made it a kinder stoppin' place fer the last two or three years."

"That's all, Windless."

"Gosh! kin I go?"

"Yes. Here's your 'weepons,' as you call them. Good-night to you, and good luck."

"Same to you, though you wou't find it," muttered the man as he turned his team and drove off among the trees.

And Old King Brady was left alone.

"It don't present a very promising appearance, I must say," he muttered as he stood under the shelter of an oak contemplating the house. "Heavens, how it rains! It is enough to give a fellow the horrors, but after all this is just the sort of place to seek the James Boys in. Hunted from Knobnoster and headed off from Montserrat, what more natural than for them to take to the woods and conceal themselves in this lonely spot?"

"But I must get to work," he added. "Jesse James is my game. If I can only get the drop on that man I'll shoot him down without mercy, but it is necessary to find him first of all. Now to investigate. Perhaps my New York methods won't do for Missouri. Anyhow, I'll try them on."

"First of all did the horsemen come this way?" he continued, stooping down to examine the tracks.

The impressions of the horses' hoofs were to be distinctly seen.

Old King Brady traced them up under the big oak tree, and then found that they turned abruptly off to the left, crossed the road, and disappeared into the forest which seemed to be comparatively open on that side.

"What does this mean?" he reflected. "It looks very much as if the fellows who are responsible for those tracks never entered the house, nor even stopped at all."

Now he returned to the point of the beginning and took up the wagon tracks.

These were easier to follow.

A moment's examination assured him that the wagon had come out of the woods first, and he had no difficulty in tracing it into the yard behind the house.

He then paused to listen and look about him.

All was as still as death except for the creaking of the great branch across the roof and the patter of rain.

Looking about him Old King Brady saw that the outbuildings belonging to the place, though once quite extensive, were now in the most dilapidated condition.

The big barn was a mere tottering ruin, and but for two great props which some one had placed against it, seemed liable to fall at a moment's notice.

Beyond the barn was a cow house in equally

bad shape, and beyond that again a wagon shed underneath which he now espied a large, mud-spattered wagon just visible through the partly closed door.

"There's the wagon now, by gracious," thought the detective.

Grasping his revolver, he stole toward the shed, and was just about to open the door when suddenly a man leaped out and thrust a pistol in his face.

"Bang!"

Old King Brady never heard the whistle of a ball so plainly, but luckily for him he moved his head just out of range.

"Bang! Bang!" went his own weapon in answer.

"Oh, God! I'm shot!" groaned the man, and he sank down across the entrance to the shed.

CHAPTER XVI.

TOM HAS A PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE.

"DRINK this—it will revive you."

"I—I don't want to move. I'd rather that you'd let me alone."

"But you'll die if I leave you alone here in the storm."

"What difference?"

"You mustn't talk like that. For your mother's sake exert yourself!"

"My mother is dead."

"For your sister's sake then."

"I never had a sister."

"But you have a sweetheart; think of her."

"It's not a pleasant thought," muttered Tom Powers, taking the proffered flask from the hand of the young girl who bent over him. "I had a sweetheart once, but I am nothing to any one now, and there's no one in the world who cares for me. For your sake, however, I'll drink it, though I'd just as soon die as live."

"Oh, you mustn't talk like that," replied the girl sweetly. "You are not badly wounded. I've seen many worse than you are live. You have only fainted from exhaustion and loss of blood. Thank God I happened to come across you, though by doing so you have spoiled all my plans."

"What do you mean?" inquired Tom, raising himself, revived by the liquor from the flask.

"No matter now," replied the girl hurriedly.

"I have got to attend to you, sir, and must not think of myself. When I first discovered you I was sure you were dying, and—Dear me, haven't I seen you before?"

She was holding the lantern between her own face and Tom's now.

"And I have seen you!" cried our hero. "I recollect now. You are Carrie Mix."

"And you are the handsome young man who was brought by that New York detective to my grandmother's house that night five or six weeks ago. Oh, yes, I remember you well. Dear me,"

"What is the matter?"

"Jesse James carried you off that night. Where have you been ever since?"

Thankful for some one in whom he could confide at last, Tom told her all that had happened since that night.

The girl listened with a shudder.

"How you must have suffered?" she murmured. "How you must suffer now? It is very strange."

"What is strange?"

"That you should be running away from the James Boys, and I from—well, no matter. I'm going back. I've got to. I must not desert you."

"Don't think of me if it is going to place you in danger."

"Oh, it will place me in no danger," replied the girl. "I shan't be any worse off than I was,

and as soon as you are able to move about we will run away together. Now lean on me—there—that's the way. Now I must lead you to the house."

With trembling and uncertain steps Tom obeyed.

Now that he was on his feet his head whirled so that he did not trust himself to think.

Everything about him whirled too.

Dimly he saw what Old King Brady was to see later.

It was the old Talmage place with its dismal surroundings.

"Wait a moment. I must be sure that we are not observed," whispered the girl. "Mr. Mix was in the yard a few moments ago attending to his team."

She drew back under the shadow of the great oak and peered forward.

The wagon had already been pushed under the shed where Old King Brady afterward found it.

There did not appear to be anybody in sight.

"Mr. Mix," stammered Tom. "Don't I remember that horrible old woman saying that her husband was killed in the war?"

"Oh, yes. She is a horrible old woman, ain't she? But you don't know her as I know her. I pray to God you never may. This man is her oldest son. He has just come back after being in State's prison for fifteen years. A worse fellow never breathed the breath of life."

"That must have been the man I rode in with," said Tom.

"Yes, that was the man."

"He tried twice to shoot me."

"He'd have tried the third time only he supposed he'd finished you. Mr. Powers, they are dreadful. That's all you have come. If I can only—Oh, what's that?"

"It seems to be a creaking, but the branch of this tree creaking across the roof."

"I reckon you're right," replied Carrie tremblingly; "but oh! all that's happened the last few days has made me so nervous. Do you know I'm awful glad you met me as you did?"

"Really, I think it was you who met me, but why do you say so?"

"Because I was going to run away to-night for the express purpose of finding you."

"Of finding me, Carrie?"

"Yes."

"And why?"

"You won't be angry if I tell you?"

"No, no."

"You see I'm different from the rest. You may have noticed it by my talk."

"I have noticed it."

"That's because I taught myself to read, and Jack has brought me lots of story books. Oh, I know we're an ignorant lot. I tried to teach myself to talk like the ladies do in novels. How do you think I've made out?"

"First-class."

"Oh, I'm so glad to hear you say so."

"But you haven't told me why you were going to hunt me up."

"I know it."

"Ain't you going to?"

Carrie's face grew as pale as death, and she drew nearer to Tom as she spoke.

"Tom," she whispered, calling him by his name now for the first time. "it was for two reasons. I know you will despise me, but—but—"

"But what?"

"I hate to tell you."

"Speak out."

"I was going to ask you to marry me. I love you, Tom—I shall die if you don't love me!"

"Phew!" whistled Tom. "Here's an adventure."

This to himself, for he never made an audible sound.

"Why don't you speak?" questioned Carrie, tremblingly. "If you only knew the life I have led you would pity me. If you only knew—"

"One moment, Carrie. What is the other reason?"

The girl straightened up proudly.

"I ain't going to tell you that till you've said that you love me," she replied. "If you consent, you will have a reward of which you little dream."

"But, my dear girl, I can't consent to marry you."

"You do not love me, then?"

"To be frank with you—no."

Carrie's face now assumed a look of abject despair.

"Do you love another?" she stammered.

"Truth forces me to own that I do."

"I could kill her."

"There, there. Calm yourself."

"I will kill her! I'll find her out and—"

"Hush! Hush! You poor child, you don't know what you say."

"Oh, yes I do. I don't want to live with grandmother any longer. I want to be a lady and wear fine clothes."

"Bless you, you wouldn't gain your wish by marrying me."

"Oh, yes, I would."

"Nonsense. I'm only a poor outcast. I haven't a cent to my name. My life is ruined and I may die before morning with this wound, for all I can tell."

"No, you shan't do that," replied Carrie, with much warmth. "Of course I suppose I can't expect you to love me all at once. Perhaps it will grow upon you. I'm going to nurse you back to health again, same as Angelina Blessing nursed Lord Cecil Montraven, in a story I once read in the Young Ladies' Weekly. At first Lord Montraven spurned Angelina's affection, but before he was well again he found that he loved her to distraction. It shall be just the same with you."

"Then there'll be no chance for you if you don't get me to some place where I can lie down soon," said Tom, faintly. "I'm growing weaker and weaker. I think I shall faint again."

"We will go at once. Here, drink some more of the whisky."

"Thank you. That revives me; but where are we going? Is it safe to enter the house?"

"With me, yes."

"But Mr. Mix? If I were well I wouldn't fear him, but as I am—"

"Oh, you won't see him—you won't see any one but me."

"Why, how is that?"

"Wait and I will show you. Meanwhile follow me."

She had to lead him, for Tom could scarcely walk unaided.

Their way lay around behind the house.

"Now be very still," whispered Carrie. "The slightest sound may betray us."

She had nothing to fear from poor Tom, however.

Faintness had come upon him again.

He tottered forward and sank unconscious upon the ground.

CHAPTER XVII.

A NEW RECRUIT IN THE CAMP OF THE JAMES BOYS, WHO, HOWEVER, IS NOT RECOGNIZED AS SUCH.

"HEAVENS! Have I killed him?" breathed Old King Brady, as the man he had shot sank to the ground.

For the old detective to take a human life was horrible.

He had ever been slow to use his weapons, but in such a case as this there was no choice.

He must either kill or be killed himself.

For a moment he paused to listen, expecting to have some one else rush out upon him, but there was no sound.

"There can't be any one in the house, or they would have heard the shots and come out to find what they mean," he reflected; but in the same breath he resolved not to rely on that.

Bending over the man, he felt his heart and pulse, finding him stone dead.

He was a tall, powerful fellow, and evidently had been a desperate one. His age must have been forty or thereabouts.

His dress was that of the average Missourian—a flannel shirt, trousers thrust in high-topped boots, and the everlasting cowboy hat.

His hair was intensely black and very long, and he wore a black beard so thick that it concealed his face almost up to the eyes. There was a cartridge belt about his waist and a shot-gun slung across his back.

Old King Brady chuckled.

"This is luck!" he muttered to himself.

He picked up the body, and flinging it upon his back, hurried around behind the barn.

He was none too soon.

Almost at the same moment he heard confused sounds in the yard, and looking stealthily around the corner of the barn, perceived that the back door of the house had opened, and a man with a long shotgun in his hand was hurrying toward the shed, while in the open doorway stood a woman, old and wrinkled, holding a flaming lamp in her right hand.

It was Mother Mix.

Old King Brady recognized her at a glance, and his astonishment was great.

What had brought the old hag at so great a distance from her former home?

But it was useless to speculate upon the matter.

There was too much to think about.

Old King Brady watched and listened.

"Tell you thar wuz somebuddy shootin' out thar," he heard the woman say.

"Don't believe it," growled the man. "It wuz only yer imagination."

"Git out. I guess I know the report of a gun when I heer it. Orter, when yer poor father wuz killed in ther war."

"Oh, bags! What's thet got ter do with it, mother? Tell yer agin, there hain't no one here."

"I'm comin' to see fer myself," replied Mother Mix. "There might be. It might be some stranger shot by one of Jesse's gang. Yer know they wuz all here to-night and mighty mad Jess wuz, tew, when he found I'd taken ther old house and wouldn't let them come in ez they've been er doing' ther last three or four years."

"Stuff, rubbish!" growled the man. "Jest as though your persuasion had any influence on Jess James."

"It did, though. You wuz asleep and didn't hear nothin'. I jest telled him right up to his face thet I'd bought ther place and couldn't accommodate him. He wuz ez nice about it ez yer plase, an' axed me ef I knew any good place where they could hide to-night."

"An' what did you tell him?"

"Why, I directed him to ther old lead mine, half a mile down ther crik what runs at the foot of ther hill. Seemed kinder curious he never hearn tell of it before."

"I don't like it," growled the man. "I don't like it fer a cent. Jesse James is a bad one. Ef he got onto your little racket our plans would be all knocked in ther head; the least he'd do would be to blackmail us right along. Gosh amighty! It does seem a though a honest, hard-

working man can never be let erlone in this world; but there hain't no one here, nohow. You've been dreamin'. I'm goin' ter give it up an' go back ter bed."

"Hold on, Pete, I'm er comin'. I know I heard three shots."

Mother Mix, lamp in hand, now started across the yard toward the shed.

Before she had gone ten feet the rain broke the chimney and the wind extinguished the lamp.

"Thar! I knowed you'd do that," growled Peter. "An' ther hain't another chimley in ther house. Go back, you old fool. I won't have no more of this nonsense!"

He seized the woman roughly and pushed her back into the house.

"Safe for the moment," thought the detective breathing more freely. "Now in the name of sense what brings that old witch here? There's some mystery about this business with the son's talk of blackmail which I'll have to fathom later on."

But it was no use to think of it now, for other and more important matters demanded the attention of the old detective.

He had formed a bold resolve even before the Mixes, mother and son, appeared upon the scene, and the information that he had gained as to the whereabouts of the gang that night confirmed him in his plans.

Bending down over the body of the dead man, Old King Brady hurriedly drew out his lantern and began an examination of his pockets.

Their contents was a medley.

There were two revolvers besides the one the man had had against the detective, which Old King Brady picked up and appropriated, two bowie knives, a clasp knife, a canister of buck shot, a paper containing bread, another of tobacco, a whisky flask and a packet of letters.

These last Old King Brady held up to the light.

They were all addressed to "Joe Jaxon, Kansas City, Mo."

Old King Brady opened several.

Each letter proved to be from no less a personage than Jesse James.

"I thought so," muttered the detective. "In fact, I was sure of it. This man is one of the James gang. He was sent back by Jesse from the camp at the old lead mine to reconnoiter and ascertain what the Mix family are doing in that house. Now, then, for my plan, and may the saints grant me success."

He hastily turned the body, and with all the skill of an undertaker drew off his coat.

It was ghastly work, but it had to be done nevertheless.

Garment after garment was removed from the body, for which Old King Brady substituted those he wore himself.

He hurriedly dressed himself in the clothing thus obtained, and emptying his pockets of various articles adapted to helping on disguises, selected from them a wig of long black hair and a beard so like that of the dead man that really when he came to fix it upon his face the resemblance to the face of the corpse was most marked.

"Guess that will do the business," he muttered. "Fortunate I brought it along, anyhow. Now, then, to hide the traces of my work."

He felt almost like a murderer as he dragged the body under the barn, hiding such of his own belongings as he could not carry beneath a big stone.

"Now to work! to work!" he muttered, as he stole away. "Old King Brady's dead, but Joe Jaxon lives. The old lead mine is my destination now."

He leaped the fence beyond the barn, and found himself in a pasture, which, after a few

steps, ran into a stretch of wooded land which was comparatively open, and extended steeply down to a little creek.

Old King Brady, with Joe Jaxon's shot-gun ready for use in his hand, hurried down the hill.

Gaining the creek, he was just about to start along its bank through the woods, when his eyes suddenly rested upon a boat lying tied to a tree.

It was a rude, leaky old affair, flat-bottomed, just knocked together out of rough boards.

"That's Jaxon's boat, I'll bet a cent," thought the detective. "Probably it belongs to the old lead mine; of course I've got to go back in it. Hello! here's some one's clothes, but where's the some one? Can they belong to Jaxon? Doubtful. However, I can't stop to fool around here on their account."

"He leaped into the boat, kicking aside an old shirt, a coat, and a pair of butternut breeches, and seized the single sculling oar which lay across the thwarts.

"It can't be that any one was with him, and has committed suicide, or gone in bathing on such a dreadful night as this," he muttered, as he pushed away from the bank.

He had scarcely got to the middle of the stream and turned the boat's head down, when a dismal cry went up from the bank.

"Gor-a-mighty! What yer doin' that fer, Joe Jaxon? You jest come on back here with that ere punt, or I'll blow the whole top of yer head off—dog on me ef I don't!"

Of course Old King Brady was startled, but to save himself he could not have restrained the inward laugh he gave.

There, standing upon the shore in the pelting rain, was a tall, white figure, utterly unprovided with clothing, except for a big cowboy hat and a long shot-gun, which he had pointed at the detective's head.

"Dod rot ye! What d'ye mean, anyhow?" he roared, starting to run along the bank. "Are ye going to leave a feller stark naked here in ther rain? Say, Joe! Luker here! It's me—Bill Jinks! Don't ye know me, ye dod blarsted fool!"

Here, of course, was the owner of the clothing, and the guard left with the boat beyond doubt.

It would never do to abandon him, yet to take him on board was to run a tremendous risk. The quick wits of the old detective, however, soon hit upon a plan.

He pulled out a big handkerchief, found in the pocket of the dead outlaw, and hastily tied it round his throat. This done he immediately began sculling the boat toward the shore.

Meanwhile the naked man was swearing horribly, running up, and all the while as uneasy as a lion in a cage.

"What in tarnation do you mean?" he snapped as the boat came near. "Why don't you speak? What ails you anyhow? Joe, I b'lieve you've been boozin' agin!"

"Thet you, Bill!" said Old King Brady in a hoarse whisper. "Gosh, I didn't know what had become of yer. Thought you must be drowned, sure."

"You're a blarsted liar. You was goin' ter go off an' leave me."

"I swar I wuzn't. I wuz goin' ter look an' see ef I could see anything of yer. Who ever heerd of a feller golu' in swimmin' a night like this."

"Well, mebbe, I orter told yer, but I didn't. I wuz thet dirty thet I had ter improve ther chance. Hain't hed a wash in three months, and by Judas, I couldn't stand it no longer, nohow; but say, Joe, what in tme's ther matter with you?"

"Blest ef I know, Bill. I muster ketched a

cold somehow. It seemed to come in my throat all of a sudden. I can't speak er loud word."

"It's goin' round in this blarsted rain—thet's what it is. Expect I'll catch the newmony myself. Say, why in thunder don't yer give a feller his clothes?"

It was very dark, and on that account Old King Brady did not yet dare to congratulate himself upon the success of his ruse.

He now handed out the clothes, and while Bill was dressing, pulled out a short clay pipe found in the dead man's pocket and, filling it, began to smoke.

"Now, thet's jist like you," growled Jinks as he dressed. "You won't never talk none when you know a feller is dyin' to know what ye fonnd up thar. Never wuz any one thet could make you talk but Jess. No wonder yer blarsted throat gets dried up."

"What do yer want to know?" growled Old King Brady.

"What yer found up ter the old Talmage house, to be sure."

"Waal, the house is thar."

"Don't be so smart."

"So's Mother Mix."

"Guess I know thet."

"And so's her son Pete."

"Pete Mix out! Yer don't say."

"Yes."

"Waal, I'll be dogoned."

"I seen him."

"Yer don't say."

"There's a big wagon thar tew, under the shed. Looks though it hed just come in."

"Waal, of course. Didn't Jess see ther tracks and send you to find out what it meant?"

"Waal, I didn't find out."

"Why not?"

"'Coz Pete Mix found me and gave me a shot."

"I know'd it. I thought I heard firing. I'd a-come up only I wuz jest in the water at ther time. Did yer wing him, Joe?"

"Can't tell. I thought he wuz hit. He scooted back to ther house so fast though thet I didn't hev time to find out."

"An' you scooted down here."

"Thet's it."

"Jess 'll be as mad az thunder."

"Why sq?"

"'Coz you didn't find out what they're up to thar."

"Waal, I guess I don't tell all I know, except to the captain," growled Old King Brady. "But I ain't goin' to talk no more. It hurts my throat."

"Yer a curt old galoot anyhow, allus wuz," growled Jinks, taking his place in the boat, for he had now finished dressing. "Come on, we may ez well git back. Guess I'll do ther sculling if you hev no objection. It'll kinder warm me up."

"Scull all yer minter," growled Old King Brady, secretly pleased at the fortunate turn of affairs.

Still he kept on the alert, for there was no telling at what moment the man might "suspicion" him, as the Missourians say.

And fortunate it was in more senses than one. Now in all probability they would enter the camp of the outlaws without a challenge.

But what then?

Old King Brady felt that he could only wait and take things as they came.

Slowly they worked their way down the creek, the disguised detective saying as little as possible.

Their way led through the forest for some distance, but at last rounding a bend in the stream the land on the right bank grew higher, and on the rise a cluster of old dilapidated buildings

"Hello, thar!" cried a voice suddenly, and the click of a cocking gun was heard.

"It's only Joe and me, Clel," shouted Jinks.

"Oh, it's you, is it?"

And a man appeared upon the bank.

"Yaas. What's Jess?"

"Up ter ther lead mine, mad ez a hornet, 'coz you've been gone so long."

"Waal, ye don't expect us to go thet distance in a minute, do yer?" wheezed Old King Brady, thinking it incumbent to say something.

"Who's thet spoke?" cried Clel Miller, suspiciously.

"Me, Joe Jaxon."

"What's yer voice? Left it up ter the Talmage place?"

"Got cold. Something come inter my throat."

"I should say ther had. Yer wheezin' like an old grindstone, but hurry up, Jess wants to see you bad."

Old King Brady trembled.

And who under the circumstances would not?

To be discovered by the outlaw meant death, and death alone.

He felt that he needed all his courage as he followed Clel Miller and Bill Jinks up the hill.

Presently they reached a big barn-like building, the first of the group, inside which a light could be seen shining.

"If there's a ghost of a chance offered I'm going to shoot that man to-night," resolved Old King Brady. "I should never venture to stay in the camp till daylight—never in the world."

They had reached the door now, and Clel Miller threw it open.

Inside were six or seven men stretched upon the floor, some asleep others smoking.

A candle burning in the neck of a bottle threw a glare upon the scene, and by its light Old King Brady saw a tall, powerfully built and not unhandsome man pacing up and down uneasily.

"So you've come at last?" he said as they entered.

He was in the presence of Jesse James.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE MYSTERIOUS HOUSE.

It was something like the transformation scene in a theater for Tom Powers, this fainting away in one spot and finding himself coming to his senses in another, and now he had done it again.

Here he was lying upon a cheap cot-bed of the old-fashioned sort covered with a blanket and fully dressed.

He was burning with fever, and every bone in his body ached horribly.

It took him some minutes to remember what had happened, and then he began wondering where he was.

A small lamp burning on the floor in one corner showed him a long and exceedingly narrow room, in which was only the cot-bed, a small table and two chairs.

There were no windows to the room, and Tom could discover no door, but above his head was a glass skylight which made him feel that he was probably under the roof of the old house, toward which the girl had led him. Of course he could be nowhere else.

But he was alone, and of this he was glad, for he would have time to collect himself and decide what was to be done.

First of all, he partially removed his clothes and proceeded to examine his wound.

It seemed serious, but he could not bring himself to consider it dangerous.

The ball seemed to have lodged itself in the fleshy part of his body just back of the left hip.

"It was terribly stiff and very painful, but

Tom felt sure that no serious damage had been done.

"I must brace up," he thought. "Of course I can stay here. That ex-State prison bird will make a finish of me certain. Wonder if he knows I'm here? Wonder how I got here, anyhow? Ah! some one is coming now."

A portion of the rough board partition had suddenly opened, and there now appeared the girl, Carrie Mix, carrying a small basket in her hand.

"Oh, oh, I'm so glad you have come to!" she exclaimed, in a low voice. "I was dreadfully worried about you. I almost thought you might be dead."

"Not just yet, Carrie. I feel badly, to be sure, but that weakness is passing away."

"I'm glad of it—very glad. You may be weak, but I do declare you are tremendous heavy!"

"What do you mean?"

"That I had to carry you into the house and up the stairs. I thought I'd never get you here."

"You did that?" cried Tom, in amazement.

"Certainly. What else could I do? Leave you to die in the yard? Beside, if Pete Mix had caught sight of you, you'd been shot to a certainty."

"Pshaw! Pete has fired at me twice and missed me both times, so I don't feel very much afraid of him."

"Oh! you don't know him. He's a terrible man!"

"I should judge so. But say, Carrie, have you any objection to telling me where I am?"

"Why, in the house, of course. The old Talmage house where we live. I brought you in by a secret door."

"What?"

"That's it. This room is a secret, too. No one knows it but myself. You see the Talmages were dreadful people. They used to make counterfeit money here long ago, until—until Mrs. Talmage murdered her husband; then they had to run away."

"Well, well!"

"Mrs. Talmage was a sister of Mrs. Mix—my grandmother, you know—that's why we came here. I am—but no matter."

"What is it?"

"Nothing."

"But you were going to say something."

"No, I wasn't."

"You certainly were. Were you going to tell me how it happens that you know the secrets of this place when the Mixes don't?"

"No—no. Don't bother me any more. See, here is some cold chicken, and bread and butter that I stole for you out of the pantry. Can't you eat it?"

"Oh, I'm sure I can. I'm as hungry as a wolf. I always eat when I'm sick."

In a few moments Tom had fully proven the truth of this claim, and he felt so much better that he began to wonder if what he had most needed had not been something to eat after all.

Meanwhile Carrie had seated herself in one of the chairs, and was looking very solemn.

"I don't know what to do," she said at last.

"About what?"

"About you."

"Oh, I'm doing first-rate as it is."

"Yes, but suppose they should suspect your presence. Think of me."

"I shall never forget you after what you have done for me to-night."

"Still you don't care for me. We ought to be—hark! What was that?"

"I heard nothing."

"Some one is coming along the road. There! don't you hear the horse turning in?"

"Yes, I do now. It's a team."

"I wish I could see who it is," said Carrie, turning pale. "Oh, dear! this is a dreadful place. I suppose I've got to go, or grandmother will be looking for me. I shall have to get him some supper."

"Who do you think it is?"

Right here there came a sound of a loud rapping at the front door below.

"Oh, no matter, I can't tell you," replied Carrie hastily. "If you ever do learn to love me, Tom, and we ever should get married, I intend to shake the whole lot of 'em, so it ain't worth while for you even to know their names. One is bad as t'other and this one is a blame sight worse."

"Did Angelina say 'blame' in talking to Lord Montraven?" asked Tom with a sly twinkle in his eye.

"No, I reckon not," replied Carrie evidently vexed. "I won't say it again neither. I'm off now. Don't you stir off the bed till you see me again if you value your life. Now mind."

She moved toward the partition, seemed to press some hidden spring and passed out by the secret door.

Tom dropped back upon the bed and for a long time lay in silence.

Meanwhile his thoughts were busy, and he found himself wondering at his situation more and more.

"She's an odd creature," he reflected, "but upon my word I really think she loves me. What are they up to in this house, anyway?"

Suddenly an idea flashed over him.

"If the Talmages were counterfeiters, why not the Mixes?" he reflected.

The thought seemed to fit in with the curious speech and actions of Carrie better than any other that had come to him yet.

"I declare I've a great mind to try and find out," he muttered. "I'm ever so much better, anyhow, if I stay quietly in this house, I'll either be shot by Pete Mix, or find myself drawn into some kind of complication with Carrie. If I only felt strong enough I'd light out after first trying to learn what these people are up to in this mysterious house."

The idea kept growing on him, until at last he had resolved to attempt it. And he softly arose, and tried to find the way of opening the secret door.

It was easily discovered.

A big nail-head in the partition, when pressed, seemed to control the latch, for a narrow door flew open, revealing a dark passage beyond.

Of course it would never do to take the lamp, and after flashing it ahead and making the discovery that before him lay an exceedingly narrow staircase, Tom put it back in the corner, turning it down low, and sallied forth.

To the best of his judgment, the staircase ran between the partitions somewhere about the center of the house, and had, no doubt, been constructed by the Talmages at the time the house was built for the express purpose of affording them a hiding-place in case the officers of the law should organize a descent.

But where did it lead to?

This question was presently answered, for the end of the stairs was reached.

Evidently this was the cellar, for beneath his feet was simply the earth, with four stone walls about him, forming a narrow vault.

"There's nothing to be gained this way," thought Tom, after he had lighted a match and surveyed the scene. "I must go back slowly. Probably I shall catch on to something soon."

He moved slowly back up the stairs and as noiselessly as possible.

He had removed his shoes, and in his stocking feet scarcely made a sound.

Step by step he advanced, listening attentively, until at last, when about half way up, he suddenly heard a voice exclaim: "James Boys! Confound it! That's too bad—too bad!"

"Wall, it can't be helped nohow," the voice of Mrs. Mix replied. "When I bought ther place, Dan, I never suspected ther James Boys had been er usin' it. How should I?"

"Well, I don't suppose you should," replied the voice, "but, all the same, it makes me sore to think that Pete has toted all the machinery up, and got everything ready to begin our work, only to find out now that we've either got to fight Jesse James or give him a finger in the pie."

"An' Frank would want another then," replied Mother Mix. "I'm e'en-a-most a mind to send fer the boys an' let 'em inter ther secret."

"Blast it all, don't be a fool!" replied the man's voice angrily. "I'll take a hammer and break the machine to pieces with my own hands before I let Frank and Jesse James into my business until I'm forced."

"Waal, suit yerself, suit yerself," growled the old woman. "You always was as stubborn as a mule, anyhow. However, I don't know ez that's any reason why I shouldn't hev a smoke."

"Oh, smoke yourself silly, for all I care," replied the man. "Has Carrie got that supper ready yet?"

"No. She's a-cooking it."

"Guess I'll go down cellar and have a look then. You can call me when it's all ready. Say, there ain't any danger of the James Boys dropping in on us to-night, is there? I've got a lot of money about me. Good money, too, put up for a certain job by the chief of the gang."

"Lorzee! Yer don't say so! Waal, I wouldn't wonder ef ther wuz danger. Only a little while afore you come, I thought I hearn them firin' out by the barn, but Pete, he says I must be dreamin'. Say, Dan, ther very best thing you kin do is to give the money ter me ter take care uv fer ye."

"To you! Well, I like that! I think I see myself. No, thank you, I'll look out for it. I know a thing or two about the old house that I rather guess you don't know. I'll take care of myself and my money in case Jesse James takes a notion to drop in."

Here a door was heard to slam, and after that came the sound of Mother Mix walking about singing in a high, cracked voice:

"Oh, ther hunters of Ken-tuc-ky!

Ther hunters of Ken-tuc-ky!

Oh, ther hunters of Ken-tuc-ky!

Ther hunters of Ken-tuc-ky!"

She never seemed to get beyond the first line, so you failed to find out who the hunters of Kentucky were or what they did.

He was very curious to know what Mother Mix was doing, though, and what the meaning was of certain strange sounds which he had heard between the words of her song.

"I'll venture a match, though it may give me away," he thought.

He lit it cautiously, and holding it up, saw before him a door with a common spring lock on the inside.

This doubtless opened into the room where Mrs. Mix was still singing, and perhaps was the very door through which he had passed when carried by Carrie to the room above.

Above the latch Tom saw, before the match was extinguished, a curious round piece of wood about as big as an old fashioned copper cent.

It instantly struck him that this might be a peep hole, and upon examining it he found that his suspicion was correct.

It moved aside on a hinge and a bright light

shot into the narrow passage through a hole about as big as a dime.

Pressing his eye to the hole, Tom found that he could see without the slightest difficulty all that was going on in the room beyond.

It was a large, square apartment, almost destitute of furniture, for except a table, one or two chairs, and the old wooden settee, which Tom remembered having lain upon that night in the cabin, there was nothing.

Mother Mix herself stood near a big old-fashioned fire-place alongside the table, upon which were strewn packages of bank bills tied together—quite a number of them.

These she was fingering, regarding them gloatingly, singing as she did so:

"Oh, ther hunters of Ken-tuc-ky—oh, ther hunters of Ken-tuc-ky!"

She had reached her fourth verse—they were all alike—when a sudden noise at the opposite side of the room caused her to look round.

Mother Mix gave a wild shriek and flung herself in front of the table, as if to conceal the piles of money spread upon it.

"Who be ye? Whar d'ye come from? What ye want?" she demanded, in a hollow voice, as with eyes wildly glaring she stared at the tall, thin figure of a young man who had suddenly appeared within the room.

"To know where you got that money, woman?" said the figure, in a deep, hollow voice. "I am the spirit of a dead man! Beware! Tell the truth."

"Oh, lorzee! I know yer! It's that boy!" screamed Mother Mix. "Oh, don't come near me! Don't tech me! I'll give it all up! I'll do ye justice —"

Just here the wind rushing through a crack in a broken pane blew the light out.

The woman's shrieks grew horrible.

"Help! Murder! Thieves! Ghosts!" she yelled.

Quick footsteps were heard in the hall. Something shot past her suddenly, and the table was heard to fall to the floor with a resounding crash, and following immediately upon it came the sound of an opening door and the voice of Pete Mix, shouting:

"Gosh all snakes, mother, what ails ye now? Hev yer got ther jimjams again?"

CHAPTER XIX.

CHASED BY THE JAMES BOYS.

It was a bold and daring deed that Old King Brady had done—very much so.

Perhaps if he had known the full measure of the desperate nature of the outlaw chief, he would never have ventured to make the attempt.

But he was in for it now, for the instant he entered the room, Jesse turned upon him, demanding:

"Why were you so long, Jaxon?"

"Coz I waited ter try and find out something, captain."

"What ails you? What's the matter with your voice?"

"Dunno. Muster cotched cold somehow. I'm so blamed hoarse I kean't hardly speak."

Jesse regarded him suspiciously.

Perhaps that moment might have been the fatal one, but just as the answer was given Frank opened the door, letting in a gust of wind which blew the candle out.

"Confound you, Frank. What did you do that for?" growled Jesse. "Don't you know our matches are all spoiled with the rain? Don't you know what a blasted bother we had to scare up even one?"

"I'm awfully sorry, Jess. I never thought. Say, you fellows. Sure one of you haven't got a match?"

But no one seemed to have one.

Though Old King Brady had a pocketful secreted about him, he was forced to say no with the rest.

"It's too blamed bad," snarled Jesse, "and just as Joe comes in, too."

"Oh, is Joe here?" asked Frank.

"Yes," replied the detective, and he had to tell the "cold" story about his voice again.

"First and foremost did you get into the house?" demanded Jesse.

"No!"

"Flames and furies, why not? Didn't I tell you about the secret door?"

"You did, but——"

"But what?"

"I was reconnoitering outside when Pete Mix suddenly came out and shot at me. I fired at him and missed him, but I thought it was a poor time to try to get in then."

"You dod blarsted idiot!" cried Jesse. "And where hev you been all the time?"

"Tending to business."

"What business?"

"The business you sent me on, captain; don't go at a feller so fierce. I had to wait for Bill, who would go in swimming, ye know."

For the moment this saved him, for Jesse James' suspicions were beginning to be aroused.

As it happened, Bill Jinks was a perfect crank on the subject of cold bathing, and never lost the opportunity to take a dip no matter what the weather might be.

"Well, I'll settle Bill when I get through with you," the outlaw growled. "Now where did you go?"

"To the Talmage place."

"Of course. I know that. Did you go into the barn?"

"Yes."

"Anything there?"

"A yoke of oxen, cap."

It was a mere guess, but actually the oxen were there.

"And then?"

"Then I went all around the house."

"And what did you find?"

"Found that some one had drove an ox team inter the yard."

"Yes, yes, we guessed that, you know. Did you find the wagon?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Under the shed."

"What was in it?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing! Are you sure?"

"Oh, yes. But it struck me that there had been something in it recently."

"What?"

"Something heavy, like a big case."

"What made you think so?"

"Coz I saw the mark where it had been dragged across ther yard to ther house."

"I wonder what was in it?" interrupted Frank.

"Can't you guess?" answered Jesse.

"Any fool can spend his time guessing."

"That's all right, brother. Don't you remember what mother told us once about old Ma'am Mix?"

"That she was the sister of Mrs. Talmage—yes, of course."

"But you don't seem to recollect what she used to say about the old man?"

"No."

"Well, I do. Old man Talmage was a counterfeiter and a mighty skillful fellow. He used at one time to work for the United States government. He had traveled all over the world and had made some money. It was he who built the house with all its secret passages. He

was intending to start into making counterfeit money on a big scale there, it was said. Perhaps he actually did do it, no one knows. Anyhow his wife murdered him, and they all skipped and were never seen again. They found the remains of the old man's body burned to a crisp, and all cut in little pieces. After that the house became deserted and has remained so ever since, as you know, until now the sister of Mrs. Talmage suddenly appears there. It is certainly very strange."

"It may be that they are going to begin making bad money again," suggested Old King Brady, who had been a highly interested listener to Jessie's story.

"Wouldn't wonder a bit. That's what I sent you to find out."

"I did the best I could, cap'n."

"Well, well, perhaps you did; but look here, did you really see Pete Mix?"

"Sartin. Don't I tell you he fired at me."

"Where was you, then?"

"Over by the wagon-shed."

"How came he to fire at you?"

"Must er made some noise, I s'pose. He kin a-rushing out, bellowing like a bull."

"Did you see the old woman?"

"Yes. She kin after him."

"Then when you fired you lit out?"

"That's the size of it, cap'n, jest about."

"Well, I tell you what it is, brother," said Jesse, "if Pete Mix and his mother are going to carry on any crooked business at the Talmage place, they've got to pay us tall, that's all. The house was just the spot for us when we came in this part of the country, and I ain't going to be turned out of it without pay, you bet."

"Bet yer life," growled Jim Cummings in the darkness.

"Same here," chimed in Clel Miller.

"What you goin' to do?" asked Frank.

"Pay 'em a visit and find out what they're up to."

"When—to-night?"

"No, to-morrow morning, I guess. We're a little too tired to-night, and it's time to turn in. Say, Jaxon, you didn't see anything of that boy?"

"No, not a thing," replied Old King Brady, wondering whom he could mean.

"Strange where he went to," mused Jesse. "I'm blamed sorry to lose him, too. I tell you, Frank, Tom Powers worked that bank racket as slick as a whistle. He'd have made a good one. It's too blame bad."

Old King Brady's ears were wide open now.

He could scarcely believe it.

Tom Powers one of the outlaws!

How mistaken he had been!

For a moment the old detective felt that the motive for his mission was gone, and he actually began debating with himself whether it would not be the best thing he could possibly do to put a bullet into Jesse, and under cover of the darkness make a break for the open, and take his chances of effecting his escape.

But the risk of such a proceeding seemed upon reflection entirely too great.

"Come, let's turn in, boys," said Jesse, suddenly. "We've got a long ride before us to-morrow if we intend to hang up that train down to Gunn City, and we'll need all the help we can get."

"Yes, but I don't like the idea of sleeping here in the dark," said Frank. "Say, you fellows, can't some one of you scare up a match that will light?"

"Blame me, ef here ain't one away down in ther linin' of my vest," called out Jim Cummings, suddenly.

"Fetch it here, Jim."

"I'm a comin'. Dogon it—who's this in my way?"

Unfortunately it was Old King Brady.

Evidently Jim was in bad humor, for stumbling against the detective, he gave him a savage push.

Instantly the detective felt something scratch his face, and he knew what had happened.

It was his false beard, which had become entangled in one of the buttons of Jim's coat.

Old King Brady clapped his hands to his face and felt it bare.

Realizing the danger he was in, he made a move in the direction of the door.

At the same instant the match flared up and was touched to the wick of the candle.

Already Old King Brady was at the door, but it was too late.

"Who's that?" yelled Jesse, catching sight of him.

"A spy, hy the eternal!" roared Frank, just as the detective sprang through the door.

In an instant all was confusion within the room, while without Old King Brady was making the best speed possible across the open space in front of the building.

Bang! bang!

Amid a tremendous shouting two shots flew after him.

The door was open now, and by the light which streamed out the could see Frank and Jesse in full chase.

Bang! bang!

Turning on his heel, the detective fired twice. The shots, however, seemed to be without effect.

The next the detective knew the whole gang was in full chase.

"Halt, there, or you're a dead man!" roared Jesse.

Bang! bang! echoed somebody's revolver.

Bang! bang! came a second.

Bang! bang! a third.

It was a fearful ordeal.

With every second Old King Brady expected to feel a bullet in his back.

It did not come, however.

The darkness was in his favor.

A moment more and he had gained the shadows of the old ore house, and dodging round the corner of the building, sped on.

He now had a moment to consider, and he gazed hurriedly about him.

A small clump of trees at the foot of the hill on the bank of the creek promised shelter, and toward it the detective ran.

Bang! Bang!

Bang! Bang!

The firing had begun again.

It really seemed impossible for Old King Brady to escape.

"I can never reach the shore," he thought, and he turned aside into a low growth of bushes on his left.

The thicket was quite dense, and now he could see nothing. Rushing on, ambitious to place bushes between himself and his pursuers, Old King Brady suddenly felt his feet sink from under him.

He wall falling!

Falling into unknown depths.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MAN AT THE SKYLIGHT.

"WHAT in name is the matter here?" roared the voice of Peter Mix, as he came darting into the room.

"Ghosts! Ghosts!" screamed the old woman. "Oh, I knowed the house was haunted! Look out, Petey, look out!"

"Oh, bags!" growled Pete; "you're off yer head agin, mother. Muster been chewin' ther

neck of that ar black bottle of your'n with a vengeance."

"No, I hain't, nuther. There wuz a ghost here—I seen it. It spoke ter me. Yer can't fool me this time, Pete Mix."

"Don't want ter fool you, mother. Ther trouble is ye fool yerself."

"No, no; I seen it. It spoke ter me."

"What'd it lock like?" spoke a deeper voice behind Peter, while Carrie came running in at the door.

"Like a young man I kuow'd once," replied Mother Mix evasively.

That started Carrie up at once.

"That's so," she said unblushingly. "I seen the same thing myself up in the garret last week when I wuz up thero getting some of them old sticks of furniture down."

"Thet sô?" demanded Mother Mix.

"Yes."

"Why'n time didn't ye tell me?"

"Thought 'twould scare you."

"Oh, I don't scare so easy."

"You don't, hey?" put in Peter. "Who just brought us up out'n the cellar yellin' and scream-in' but you? Who took me out in ther rain fer nothin' a while ago——"

"Shet up! I won't be talked to like that by my own son," snarled Mother Mix, who all the while was bustling about in the dark. "Guess I know what I hearn and what I seen without being told I lie by you."

"Tut, tut! No hard words, my friends," said the other voice. "What did the ghost say to you? Come now, tell us that."

"Said 'I'm ther spirit of er dead man.'"

"Ha, ha, ha! Well, he needn't have taken the trouble to tell that if he actually was a ghost; but, say, why don't you light up? Who put the light out anyway?"

"Ther ghost blowed it out," whined the old woman. "I'm looking for a match as fast ez ever I kin, Dan. Don't be so durned impatient, boy."

"Seems to me yer lookin' in a quare place then," said Pete. "What yer doin' on the floor?"

Pete now produced a match and tried to strike it on his trousers, but like the matches of the James Boys, it was too damp.

"Don't light up yet! Don't!" screamed Mrs. Mix, scrambling around on all fours.

Somehow she managed to get between Pete's legs, and down he went sprawling with an awful crash.

"Ha! ha! ha! Ho! ho! ho! Hoo! hool hoo!"

A deep, sepulchral voice was laughing somewhere in the darkness as the man addressed as Dan struck a match.

Oh, let me up! let me up!" roared Pete.

"Ain't a-holdin' on yer, Dan. Dan, wuz thet you what laughed?"

"No, it wasn't," replied Dan, who had just succeeded in rescuing the candle and lighting it. "Good gracious! what's all this? Have you been fooling with some of the boxes in the cellar?"

"Yes, what is this?" echoed Pete, who had managed to regain his feet. "Speak, old woman! Explain!"

And certainly explanation was necessary.

There, scattered about the floor under the overturned table and beyond it lay bundle after bundle of bank notes, tied up with paper straps and fastened with big black pins.

Mother Mix, who sat on the floor, had her apron full, but it was not half of what lay upon the floor.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" whined the old woman, "this is dogoned hard."

"What, the floor?" asked Dan, laughing heartily.

He was a tall, heavy man, with brown hair, blue eyes and big fat cheeks which shook like jelly fish as he laughed.

"Now you know well enough, Dan Talmage!"

"On the contrary, my dear aunt, I know nothing at all about it; but I do know that while we're fooling here my supper is spoiling in the kitchen stove. Carrie, girl, don't forget me. If you let that bacon burn there'll be trouble in the camp."

"Carrie vanished, but she was not laughing. On the contrary, she appeared very much concerned."

Meanwhile Mrs. Mix had never moved, but sat on the floor clutching her apron with a most woe-begone expression on her face.

"Why, these ain't no queer, Dan," exclaimed Pete, who had picked up one of the bundles. "Them's genuwine good bills."

"No, they ain't nuther," said Mrs. Mix, "they're just a lot of counterfeits I found up garret. Guess yer father, muster made 'em Dan, and they weren't taken along."

"My father went out of the world too sudden to take anything along, thanks to your precious sister," laughed Dan, as though it were all part of the joke.

"Well, yer needn't go a heavin' that in my face. Guess Nance Talmage wuz yer mother anyhow."

"Oh, there's no doubt about that, auntie, but say, your story won't wash."

"Why won't it wash? It's true."

"No it ain't nuther," put in Pete, "it's a dogoned lie. I kean't read, I'll allow, but I know ther difference between the old State bank notes what Uncle Talmage uster make and modern greenbacks, you can just bet."

"He's got yer there, auntie," laughed Dan. "Ho, ho, ho! Ha, ha, ha! Come, own up, and tell us where you prigged all the cash?"

"I airned it takin' in washin' and sellin' eggs up to Round City," whined the old woman. "You jest let alone, Pete Mix. Don't you dar to tech 'im, Dan Talmage!"

But in spite of her protests they kept on helping her pick up the bills.

"Leave alone! You shan't tech 'em! Leave alone, I say!" she cried.

"Supper's ready, Dan!" cried Carrie from the kitchen.

"There, I won't bother you no more, auntie!" exclaimed Dan, throwing down the bundles he had gathered up upon the table, which had now been restored to the perpendicular. "Come on, Pete. Have a bite with me. I want to talk about the machine."

"I'll be there in a minute, Dan."

"Oh, come on now and leave your mother alone."

"You go on. I'll follow."

Dan went out laughing; his back was no sooner turned than Pete, closing the door, seized Mother Mix roughly and pulled her to her feet.

"Whar'd yer get 'em?" he demanded. "Come, speak up."

"Oh, Petey! Petey! Yer own mother, tew!"

"Whar'd yer get 'em? Tell me, an' stop yer snivelin'! Consarn ye, ef yer won't spit it out I'll collar every blame one of them packages myself."

"You'd better not!"

"I will!"

"You'll be sorry ef yer do."

"I'm goin' ter do it now and ter smash yer head in ther bargain. Speak!"

"Hush! Not so loud. I'll tell yer ef ye'll keep dark."

"Well, well?"

"I'm almost afeard."

"You hev more reason to be afeared, if ye don't."

"Oh, I'll tell yer, I'll tell yer."

"Why in thunder don't yer do it, then? Thar! Don't yer hear Dan a-callin'? Speak quick."

"Wull, then, Jess James give 'em to me—thar!"

"What?"

"Know'd ye wouldn't believe me," grumbled the old woman, who was hopping about like some bird of ill omen, gathering up the fallen packages.

"Did Jess really give 'em to yer?"

"Yes; he'd kill me if he know'd I'd tole."

"What did he give 'em to yer for?"

"Why, ter keep fer him, ter be sure. They come out of a bank he'd robbed."

"Old woman, yer lyin'!"

"Nice kinder talk that ter one's own mother."

"When'd Jess give 'em ter yer?"

"Ter-night when he stopped here. Said he expected the sheriff after him an' he wanted ter leave this money whar it would be safe."

"Holy Judas, what a whopper."

"How'd you know anything erbout it? You were lying ou the settee asleep at the time!"

"No, I wuzn't neither. I was lookin' out at yer while yer talked to Jess. I'd my eye fixed ter thet hole in ther shutter, and I know blame well thet he never give you these bills at all."

Mother Mix made a gesture of despair.

"Git out! Git out!" she screamed. "I won't hev you here a-blackguardin' me."

"I'll go, but you'll hev ter fork over my share of thet boodle," growled Pete. "You old thief! Now I know whar ye got ther money to buy this place with. The yarn about havin' saved it up was all poppycock, an' I mightier kuowed it at ther time."

He rushed angrily out of the room, banging the door after him, which Mother Mix immediately took the precaution to lock.

"Wull—wull—wull!" she muttered. "Now I am in er fix! Pete's got into it, an' he'll give me no rest till I've give up everything. I've er dogoued good mind ter run away."

She began counting the packages of bills with a good deal of repetition and recounting to correct supposed mistakes.

"Kean't make but fifty-nine nohow," she groaned, "an' I know there wuz sixty. Oh, dear! I wish I hadn't er taken 'em out at all. Mebbe Pete took the missing one. Ef he did I'll never get it back in the world."

She now moved to the fire-place, and, stooping down, raised a portion of the hearthstone which was split in two pieces, disclosing a cavity beneath.

Into this hole she placed the pile of bills, and, having restored the stone to its former position, was just about to rise, when her ears were saluted with a dismal groan.

When she looked around—and she lost no time in doing it—there was the tall, pale-faced figure standing before the partition again.

"Ah, ha!" exclaimed the voice. "Ah, ha! I have you now! Woman, beware! Beware!"

Then the figure glided forward, and would have been at her side in another second.

"Oh, oh, oh!" screamed Mother Mix, wildly. "Help! Pete! Dan! The ghost! The ghost!"

At the same instant there came a furious pounding at the door, and Mother Mix, whose fright was genuine, fell down in the fire place in a dead faint.

"Let me in! Let me in, or I'll mash the door down!" roared Pete's voice outside.

He did it, too, and came tumbling into the room after it.

Before he got in, however, the supposed ghost had glided back through an open panel in the partition and disappeared.

Of course it was Tom Powers.

If any of our readers have doubted it from the first, all we've got to say is that they can congratulate themselves upon being very dumb.

"Pshaw!" he muttered, as he fled up the secret staircase, "if he'd only kept away a moment longer, I'd have had it. Perhaps, though, it would have only set them to searching the house. I begin to think I've made a fool of myself, after all."

He gained the room which he had left in disobedience to Carrie's express commands, and fell panting upon the bed.

"So it was that old witch who got the money," he groaned. "Why did I never guess it? Why——"

He paused suddenly.

Every drop of blood in his veins seemed to turn to ice.

He was looking up now—up toward the skylight in the roof.

It slowly opened as he gazed upon it, and a man's head and shoulders appeared.

The man wore long black hair like the James Boys; there was a big white hat upon the head, while the hand thrust through the opening clutched a revolver, which was pointed straight at poor Tom on the bed.

"One word—a sound," whispered a deep voice, "and you are a dead man!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ESCAPE FROM THE LEAD MINE.

WE left Old King Brady in a pitiable plight, falling into some unseen pitfall, in the midst of the clump of bushes in which he had taken refuge from the James Boys.

Instantly the shrewd mind of the old detective grasped the situation and realized just what had occurred.

"I have fallen into one of the shafts of the old lead mine," he thought, when suddenly he struck water and sunk beneath it with a resounding splash.

For the moment this seemed a dire calamity, but in the next Old King Brady was ready to bless the water.

And well he might.

It had saved him.

But for its presence in the bottom of the shaft he would have been dashed to pieces on the ragged rocks.

Instantly he put his feet down, and to his intense relief touched bottom.

In a moment he was standing upright in the bottom of the shaft with water up to his neck.

"Hello, down thar! Are ye killed?" called a voice above him.

Old King Brady drew down under the water, and none too soon.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Three shots rang out.

The bullets struck the water, but, fortunately for the detective, not one of them struck his head.

"He ain't there!" he heard the voice of Jesse James say, as he now thrust his head out for air.

"Tell you he is, brother," replied Frank's voice. "Must be. Can't be nowhere else."

"Mebbe he run through the bushes and down to the shore," he heard Jim Cummings say.

"No, he didn't," answered Frank. "He tumbled into the old shaft, and it's a blame good job some of us didn't tumble in, too."

"Wish we had a lantern," said Jesse. "I'd like to make sure he's dead."

"But we hain't," answered Frank. "If he's there, he's dead, anyhow. That shaft is a hundred feet deep most likely. Wouldn't he have hung out when we fired if he'd been alive?"

"Thank goodness, they have no lantern, and

don't guess the truth," thought Old King Brady.

He drew down under the water once more, lest they should fire again.

But they did not, and after some further conversation their footsteps were heard retreating, and the detective found himself alone.

Had they gone for a lantern, a ladder or a rope?

Either of the propositions were full of danger, and Old King Brady felt that it behooved him to get out as soon as he possibly could.

But how was this to be accomplished?

There was the rub.

To climb up the sides of the shaft he found was entirely out of the question.

The water was icy cold and chilled him horribly. It was quite clear that his chances were poor unless something could be done at once.

Just then a curious noise greeted the detective, which for the moment startled him.

It was a bursting sound, followed by a rush of water.

At first he thought that more water had been turned in upon him, but in the next instant he discovered, to his great joy, that the truth lay exactly the other way.

The water which was already in the shaft was rushing out.

It was going quite rapidly, too.

In a moment it had sunk to his waist, and soon it got down to his knees.

Before long it was all gone, and Old King Brady found himself standing upon the slimy bottom of the shaft.

Better provided than the outlaws, Old King Brady had his dark lantern with him, which was constructed after a peculiar fashion, being entirely water-proof.

He now produced it, and lighting it with one of the matches which he always kept in readiness inside the case, proceeded to flash it about.

Presently he saw the cause of the sudden disappearance of the water—at least it was explained in part.

Opening off from one side of the shaft was a narrow drift, or tunnel, through which a small stream still trickled, showing the course by which the bulk of the water had left the shaft.

The tunnel was not more than four feet high, and just about twice as wide as Old King Brady's body.

It seemed to be in an unfinished state—some idea begun and not fully carried out.

Without hesitation, the old detective crawled in and crept cautiously forward.

The tunnel had a sharp descent and grew narrower as he advanced, getting so small at last, that when the end was reached there was just room enough for Old King Brady to crawl through.

He found himself standing on the side of the hill overlooking the creek. A large mass of mud below him showed plainly enough that the mouth of the tunnel had been stopped up, and under the pressure of the water had suddenly burst.

"And mighty lucky for me that it all happened just as it did," muttered Old King Brady.

But then Old King Brady's luck had long ago become a proverb among his brother detectives, and now he scarcely gave it a second thought.

Pocketing his lantern, he stole down to the creek and began to think of his next move.

Above him at the buildings complete silence reigned, yet there was no telling who might be on the watch.

Another man might have swum the creek, which was not over twenty feet wide, and been in safety inside of a few moments.

But Old King Brady, alas! could not swim a stroke.

"If I could only capture that boat," he

thought, and he began slowly working his way along the shore.

He fully expected it, and sure enough it came.

"Who goes thar?"

A white hat was looming up among the bushes at just about the spot where Old King Brady had left the boat.

It was touch and go—then or never.

Bang! Bang!

The man dropped to the ground.

"Take that for your answer," muttered Old King Brady, dashing on.

In less than ten seconds he was in the boat.

He knew that the shot would start up the whole gang, of course, and so it did.

Scarce had he time to work the boat across the creek, and under the deep shadows of a clump of alders on the other side, when the door of the building at the lead mine flew open, and dark figures with white hats looking like halos about their heads, and shadowy shotguns dimly seen, came trooping forth.

"Hello thar, Sile Maxwell, did you fire?" called Frank James' voice cautiously.

No answer came but the howling wind and the pelting rain.

"Sile's shot, by time?" Frank shouted. "Jess! Jim! Clel! Some one's straggling about here. Wake up, boys! Quick!"

The old detective could hear them rushing down to the shore, and knowing that the disappearance of the boat must be soon discovered, he lay perfectly motionless under the alders, wondering what they would do.

What's the matter he heard Jesse's voice ask presently.

He could see the outlaw king descending the hill, and could not help regretting that Joe Jaxon's shotgun had been left in the house, for with that long-barreled weapon nothing would have been easier than to have picked him off.

"Confound it all, I'm getting used to killing," muttered Old King Brady; "I only wish one of the poor ignorant wretches I've taken off to-night was the arch-scoundrel of the gang, but it seems it's not to be."

"Sile's shot, brother," he heard Frank answer in his usual cool and solemn way.

"Who shot him?"

"Dunno."

"What d'ye think?"

"I think it was that fellow who played off on us as Joe Jaxon. Ten to one he's killed Joe, too."

"You were so thundering sure he was dead at the bottom of that shaft!" sneered Jesse. "Well, well, so it seems you were mistaken, and your mistake has cost poor Sile his life."

"Don't blame me, Jesse; I was honest about it."

"Honest be blowed. It's better to be sure than sorry—my motto. But say, Frank, where's the boat?"

"Gone, by gracious!" Jim Cummings was heard to exclaim.

"Who's taken it?" said Clel.

"That spy of course," sneered Jesse. "No doubt he's hanging about here under some of them bushes listening to every blame word we say!"

Frank was furious.

He stormed about, cursing like a madman. The shore was searched in vain.

Sile was dead, and Joe Jaxon ditto, in all probability. Who was the bold individual that had perpetrated the deed? That was what the outlaw brothers wanted to know.

"I kean't imagine who it can be," Old King Brady heard Jesse remark.

"Must be a detective," suggested Frank.

"Detective be blowed! Do you think any detective would dare to come among us that way?"

Not now. Since I finished Cap Wright that time detectives have given me the go by completely. That old Brady fellow was only an accident. He might have done it, had he lived, for they say he was bold enough for anything, but he's dead, you know."

"Then who can it be?"

"Do you know what I think, boys?" said Frank, who was pacing up and down the shore.

"No—what?" asked Jess.

"I think that Joe Jaxon did go inside the old Talmage house, according to orders, and got nabbed."

"Well?"

"This spy is one of Pete Mix's gang, come over to see what we're goin' to do, or mebbe it's Pete himself."

"I'll bet a hundred to ten that it ain't Pete Mix," responded Jess. "I've knowed Pete since he was knee high to a toad, and a bigger coward never walked on two legs. He'd jest as soon think of ramming his head into a fiery furnace as poking it within smelling distance of the James Boys' camp."

"That's so," chimed in Clel. "I kin vouch for it thet ther captain's right."

"Then it's some of the fellers he's drawn round him," persisted Frank, "for, of course, Pete Mix, Carrie and the old woman ain't working the racket alone, Jess. I move we git breakfast, an' then go up to ther house an' clean 'em out."

"Jest what we'll do," replied Jesse. "We'll kill the men, every mother's son of 'em, but Carrie an' the old woman shan't be hurt. We'll leave 'em that ox team and tell 'em to travel off somewhere else."

It seemed to be decided, for all hands now started up the hill carrying the body of their dead companion with them.

"And while you fellows eat breakfast, I'll keep on working," thought the detective, who had been an attentive listener to all that had been said.

"I'm beginning to grow curious about the old Talmage place myself. I want to know what's going on in there, and I propose to find out."

Silently he shot out from under the shadow of the alders and began sculling up stream.

It seemed a bit strange that the outlaws had left no one to guard the shore, but such was the fact.

In a few moments Old King Brady was beyond sight and hearing of the old lead mine.

Oh, if I could only have stayed among them a little longer. If I could only have got my clutches on the money stolen from the Knobnoster bank," he kept thinking.

But regrets were useless. It was not to be.

At last he reached the cove from which the boat had been taken and leaving it concealed under the bushes in case he should find further use for it, the detective stole up the hill and gained the barn once more.

"I may as well keep my present disguise," he muttered. "It's as good as any other—perhaps better. As long as they think Old King Brady dead he must remain dead. I'll get the rest of my things though from under the stone."

He did so, and cautiously crept up to the house.

Here all was quiet, though it was evident that the inmates had not retired, for a light could be seen burning through the cracks of the tightly closed shutters.

Everything was just as he had left it, except that there was a mud-bespattered buggy standing in the yard.

Evidently there had been a new arrival at the Talmage place since he had left.

"Wonder where Jesse James' secret door is?" thought Old King Brady; but of course there was no use in wasting time searching for it

For the moment the detective had some faint idea of knocking boldly and claiming shelter for the night, but the idea was abandoned almost as soon as conceived.

"I don't think that would answer," he reflected. "Then they'd all be watching me. What I want is the opportunity to prowling about that house alone."

He made the entire circle of the building, wondering by what means he could effect an entrance.

The heavy wooden shutters covered every window; the doors looked strong enough to resist the attack of a regiment.

Some dim idea of getting in by the cellar windows had been in his mind, but there were no cellar windows to be seen.

At last he got around to the front of the house again, and stood leaning against the big oak tree.

"Possibly there is a sky-light in the roof," he thought, suddenly. "I could climb this tree easily enough, and to work my way along that limb and on to the roof would only be child's play. If I can't get in that way, I'm afraid I shall have to give it up."

To think was to act, and he began climbing the tree at once.

It was hard work until the crotch was reached, but Old King Brady managed to accomplish it. Then up among the bratches he went until he reached the overhanging limb, and so on little by little, he worked his way on to the roof.

There was the sky-light, just as he had expected. In fact, there were two of them.

Through the first Old King Brady could see nothing; but when he had dragged himself along the slippery shingles to the second, he discovered that there was a light burning in the room beneath.

Cautiously he bent over it, and looked down into a small room, where there was a bed, a table, and a couple of chairs, and a lighted lamp burning in a corner.

There was, however, no one in the room.

"This is my chance," thought the detective, and he set himself to work to open the sky-light.

It seemed to be fastened on the inside by an ordinary hasp, and worked on hinges.

Feeling in his pocket the detective produced a long, thin piece of steel, which he ran in between the casing and the frame, easily pushing the hasp to one side.

He had just finished this, and had turned back the skylight, when he was suddenly startled by the entrance of a young man, who came bounding into the room, and, closing the door behind him, flung himself upon the bed.

Quick as a flash Old King Brady whipped out his revolver.

"One word—a sound?" he whispered, "and you are a dead man!"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE NIGHT ATTACK.

Tom leaped to the floor in deadly terror.

At the same time Old King Brady leaped down from the roof.

Then he knew him, and not till then.

Before, not even a suspicion had crossed his mind.

"Tom Powers!" he exclaimed. "Tom!"

Tom's first idea was that the intruder was one of the James Boys' gang—some member of the band whom he did not know.

"What do you want with me?" he muttered, gloomily, in despair at the idea of joining the gang again.

"Well," said Old King Brady, putting up his revolver and sinking into a chair. "I want sev-

eral things with you, Mr. Tom Powers. First of all, I want to know if you remember me."

"No, I don't."

"Look sharply."

"I don't know you."

"Sure?"

"Oh, confound it, yes. I suppose you are one of the gang, but I can't be expected to know you all."

"Humph! You seem pretty familiar with the gang, anyway."

"Ain't I a right to be? Ain't I one of them myself?"

"I am very sorry to hear you say so, my boy," replied the detective, quickly, at the same time removing for the moment his wig. "Come, do you know me now?"

"Old King Brady, the detective!" cried Tom, in amazement. "It cannot be!"

"It's no one else."

"They told me you were dead."

"Who told you?"

"Jesse James."

"Jesse James is not my keeper. When I get ready to shuffle off I don't propose that he shall be consulted at all."

"I can scarcely believe it."

"What?"

"That it is really you."

"It's as hard for me to believe that Tom Powers has joined the James Boys. I can't understand it and that is all."

"No, I suppose you can't. I feel sometimes as though I can't understand it myself."

"I trusted you so," mused the detective. "I was fool enough to flatter myself that I could read your true character in your face. I thought you innocent, honest, true. I—"

"Stop! stop!" cried Tom, in agony. "For God's sake stop! I'm a fool, I allow—a weakling; and I've done wrong, but as Heaven hears me, I am not a criminal, although the law might make me out as such."

"But you have actually joined the James boys."

"I have been with them for some weeks."

"Were you the young man who engaged at the Knobnoster Bank yesterday and assisted in the robbery?"

"I'm ashamed to say I was; but—"

"You have reason to feel shame for that act, young man. Now don't ask me to believe that you did not rob the Coyote bank as well, for it would be too hard a job for me to twist my mind that way."

"But I didn't. The story I told you was actually true."

"Tut, tut!"

"Will you hear me?"

"And to think," mused the detective, "how I stood up for you with your uncle. How Ethel Mortyard believes in you. It is sad, sad."

"Have you seen my uncle?"

"Yes."

"And he believes in me?"

"Yes. I am here searching for you by his express wishes."

"It is terrible. Oh, if you would only hear me."

"I don't see what you can possibly say to justify yourself."

"But I can. I will."

"Hark! What noise was that?"

"Only the big branch of that oak tree outside being scraped over the roof by the wind."

"What place is this? How came you here? Is there any danger of our being disturbed?"

"I can't answer so many questions at once. This house is occupied by a gang of desperate counterfeiters—the old woman we met in the hut that night and her brood."

"I suspected it."

"And I know it."
 "Are you one of them?"
 "Not a thousand times no! I'm only here by the merest accident. Oh, Mr. Brady, if you only would let me tell my story in my own way and explain."
 "So you shall," said the detective—"so you shall. Perhaps, after all, I've been a bit too hard with you. Fire away, Tom. I'll listen to all you have to tell."
 And he did.
 Tom plead his cause eloquently, telling the whole story.
 Old King Brady never spoke until he was through.
 "Well, is that all?" he asked then.
 "Yes."
 "It's a strange story."
 "And true, every word of it."
 "I do not doubt it."
 "I was afraid you would."
 "No, I believe you. I understand your true character now."
 "And what do you think of me?" asked Tom wearily.
 "I think you have been morally very weak, but I blame your physical condition for your action, to a certain extent."
 Tom sighed.
 "Well, there's some slight comfort in that," he said, "but I am feeling dreadfully prostrated now. I'm going to lie down."
 "Take a little of the whisky, it will revive you."
 "But I don't like to drink whisky."
 "Nor do I, but in a case of this kind—there, that will do the business. Now let me examine your wound?"
 "Nothing serious," Old King Brady said after the examination was made. "Now while you lie there let us talk and plan fast. I suppose that love sick mald may return at any time."
 "Carrie Mix? Oh, yes, at any moment."
 "Do you want to return to Jesse James?"
 "Oh, don't ask me such a question—of course not."
 "You prefer to join issue with me then?"
 "Certainly."
 "Look here, Tom, there's one thing you haven't told me yet."
 "I know."
 "The black bag!"
 "Yes. I kept that till the last."
 "I wondered why you didn't mention it. I suppose the James Boys got the money?"
 "Indeed, they did not."
 "What?"
 "Jesse and Frank have searched everywhere for it. They think it was lost in Brandy Creek. I never even gave them a hint that you found it."
 "Good boy."
 "I've sworn to restore that money to my uncle, Mr. Brady, and I'm going to do it, too."
 "I hope you may, but you've got to find out where it is first."
 "I know!"
 "You do?"
 "Yes."
 "Then why in the name of sense haven't you already started for Chicago? What are you knocking about the country with the James Boys for, robbing banks and stage coaches, when you have thousands of dollars at your command?"
 "Go slow, Mr. Brady, go slow! I've only known where the money was for a few moments."
 "Ah!"
 "It is in this house."
 "I begin to see."
 "I think you were rather foolish that night, Mr. Brady, if you will allow me to say so."

"I begin to think so myself."
 "You never tumbled?"
 "Well, I confess an idea did come across my mind, but I banished it as unworthy of consideration—"
 "Mother Mix?"
 "Mother Mix!"
 "She took the bag from the rose bushes!"
 "She got it somehow. I don't know anything about any rose bushes."
 "Oh, that belongs to my part of the business. I dropped the bag among some rose bushes alongside the house."
 "Then that is where she found it. Although I have never seen it since that night when I went off my head in the hut, I am morally certain the old woman has it now."
 "How so?"
 "Look at this."
 Feeling in his pocket, Tom pulled out a big roll of bank-notes tied around with a paper strap and tossed it into Old King Brady's lap.
 "Great Scott! you've got the kernel of the nut, but not the shell."
 "Only this. I had no time to get the rest."
 "You are sure that this pile of bills came from the bag?"
 "As sure as I can be. What mark is that on the strap?"
 "\$500."
 "Very good. I wrote those figures myself."
 "Can you swear to that?"
 "Yes."
 "Then that settles it. Now, perhaps, you will tell me how those bills came into your hands?"
 Tom told the story of his adventures on the secret stairs.
 "Well, well!" exclaimed Old King Brady, "and so you were the ghost?"
 "I was."
 "The old woman recognized you?"
 "I'm sure of it; but I told her I was the spirit of a dead man, and she believed what I said."
 "Tom, we must get that money."
 "So I think."
 "And quick, too. Listen now to my story, and you will see the necessity of haste."
 "Oh, if you could only have captured the Knobnoster bank money," sighed Tom. "I shall never forgive myself for my part in that evil work."
 "That may come later. We must first make sure of the Coyote bank money."
 "Can you still trust me, Mr. Brady?"
 "To a limited extent—yes; but I'd rather have you under my eye."
 "You don't think moving about will injure me?"
 "I'm sure it ain't. It would be better to keep quiet of course, but to move can do you no serious harm."
 "Then tell me your plan, and I'll help you any way I can."
 "My only plan is to get the money. You must tell me how, for you and not I know where it is."
 "It's down-stairs in the sitting-room under the hearth-stone."
 "Indeed. And who is there?"
 "I left them all there. Like enough Pete Mix has collared it by this time."
 "And this man who came in the buggy—who is he?"
 "His name is Dan Talmage. He is Mrs. Mix's nephew. He seems to be the head of the counterfeiters. They've got a piece of machinery in the cellar—"
 "Brought in by Pete on the ox team?"
 "I guess so."
 "Good, good. Now enough of comparing notes. We understand each other. We are to

get that money and make tracks for the nearest railroad station. You can then go on to Chicago, and I'll return and try my hand once more with Jesse James."
 "But how can we reach the station? I could never walk."
 "Ain't Dan Talmage's horse in the barn and his buggy in the yard? We'll take them, to be sure."
 Tom shook his head.
 "That man is no fool," he said, "and even Pete knows how to shoot, as I came near being able to testify to my sorrow. If we could only get Carrie interested now—"
 "No, no, don't think of it. And speaking of Carrie reminds me that the girl may be here at any moment. We must be up and doing. What's our first move?"
 "To get down to the sitting-room, I suppose; but we'll want something to put the money into."
 "How would a pillow case answer?"
 "The very thing."
 Old King Brady stripped off the pillow case and Tom opened the secret door.
 "Hush! Be as quiet as possible," he whispered.
 "Trust me. Nobody was ever disturbed by the noise of my footfalls yet."
 They stole down the stairs together, Old King Brady's dark lantern came splendidly into play just now.
 "Here's the place," whispered Tom. "Now then, is there any one in the room or not?"
 "Where's your peep-hole?"
 "Here."
 "Open it."
 Tom did so, and peered into the room.
 "The old woman is lying on the floor," he whispered. "The door has been broken in—she looks as if she were dead."
 Old King Brady pushed Tom aside and peered through the hole.
 "No, she ain't dead," he whispered, for the light which still burned in the sitting-room enabled him to see the interior distinctly.
 "She ain't dead, but it looks very much as if her rascally son had given her a pretty bad shaking up."
 "He's bad enough for it."
 "I don't doubt it. Who's to venture in?"
 "I suppose I better. I know where the money is hidden, and you don't."
 "Stop, I think I'd better go. I'm more used to such business. Point out the place."
 "Under the hearth-stone on the left. She just raised it up. I guess you'll have no trouble in doing the same."
 "Here goes, then," breathed the detective, and opening the secret panel, which moved noiselessly, he stole into the room.
 He could hear Mother Mix groaning, but she did not move.
 As she lay Old King Brady was behind her, and it would have taken a sharper pair of ears than hers to hear his tread.
 But he had scarcely reached the hearth than a furious knocking sounded upon the outer door.
 "Open up here—open up, you old witch!" a harsh voice was heard shouting.
 Mingled with the shouts were other sounds—loud talking, general confusion, and the tramp of horses' feet.
 "Great heavens, it's the James Boys!" breathed Old King Brady, pausing.
 "Help! help! Pete—Dan! Murder—thieves!" screamed a shrill voice in his ear.
 Mother Mix had staggered to her feet, and leaping upon him like a tigress, she clutched the detective by the throat.

CHAPTER XXIII.

TOM FINDS HIMSELF WITH THE GANG AGAIN.

"JAMES BOYS—James Boys!" roared Mother Mix. "You can't rob me! It's had enough to be licked by one's own son, but I'll be dogoned if I don't choke you to death!"

In fact she seemed in a fair way to do it, for the grip of her long skinny fingers seemed like iron.

Old King Brady was actually getting black in the face when Tom sprang to the rescue and tore the woman away.

"Oh, the ghost! the ghost!" she yelled, making for the door. Dan! Petel Help! Help!"

"Bang! Bang! Bang!"

Three shots could be heard without, and the bullets striking the shutters passed straight through them, shattering the glass and sending it down rattling at their feet.

"Quick, Tom! Quick!" whispered Old King Brady. "Which side of the hearth was it?"

"This side."

"All right. Here goes."

Old King Brady thrust his knife in behind the stone and pried it up.

There beneath it lay the piles of bills intact.

But not yet was it written that Old King Brady's hands should close upon them.

Mother Mix looked out for that.

Dan and Pete could be heard running up the cellar stairs, and perhaps she feared her own as much or more than strangers—at all events she tore herself away from Tom, who had seized her, and giving one wild leap, landed upon Old King Brady's back, and knocked him down.

"Seize the money, Tom, put it in the bag and skip," whispered the detective, hurriedly. "I've got this she devil on my hands. Wait for me around back of the barn."

Tom picked up the bag, and in a moment had tumbled the packages of bills inside—long experience had taught him just how to handle them—he flung the bag over his shoulder, and vanished through the secret door.

Bang! Bang! Bang! rattled the shots without.

They were directed against the shutters, and were intended to rouse the inmates of the place.

It was the cheerful way the James Boys had of letting the folks know that they had dropped around for an evening call.

"Leggo of me! Murder! Fire! Thieves! James Boys!" old Mother Mix could be heard yelling viciously, as the pannel closed behind them.

After that all was one confused roar, and Tom, with wildly beating heart, ran up-stairs with the pillowcase and its precious contents hugged fast.

But when he reached the top he found that all he could do was to run down again, for it was out of the question to think of climbing to the skylight crippled as he was.

"If I only knew where that secret door was," he thought, and he stood listening breathlessly to the sounds outside.

Things had grown quieter by this time.

In fact, the shooting had ceased, and only loud, bolsterous laughter, swearing and the stamping of horses' feet could be heard.

Tom started down-stairs to reconnoiter, for he was too uneasy to keep still.

Before he had got half way to the little landing, off from which the secret panel opened, he met Carrie running up, with her eyes as big as saucers, and looking very much frightened.

"Is it you?" she demanded, angrily, flashing the candle which she carried in Tom's face.

"Yes. What is it?"

"Have they captured the house?"

"Captured nothing."

"What do you mean by this? Why didn't you

stay in bed as I told you to do? Why have you stolen grandmother's money? Speak?"

"Come, my dear girl, I like that!" cried Tom.

"No doubt you know the money is mine."

"It's no more yours than it is grandmother's. You stole it. We know who you are."

"Carrie, I didn't steal it."

"Yes, you did. What's the use in lying?"

"You are complimentary."

"I tell the truth. You're a liar and a thief, but I love you just the same."

"Oh, don't bother about love. Show me how to get out of the house, and I'll pay you well."

"There's only one way you can pay me."

"How's that?"

"By promising to marry me. I was going to take the money myself, Tom, and fly with you. It's all the same in Dutch if you take the money and fly with me."

"Carrie, you're a caution."

"I'm frank and open, that's all. We're all thieves together, and we may as well own up to it. Say, Tom, who's your friend?"

"Oh, a fellow I know."

"How did he get in?"

"No matter."

"So you were only shamming, after all? Well, I like you all the better for being so all-fired smart. Say, are you going to consent to marry me or not?"

"I'll think about it."

"No, say you will and I'll show you the secret door."

"All right, show me the door."

"Oh, you dear fellow!" exclaimed Carrie, and before Tom knew what was coming she had kissed his cheek with a resounding smack.

"Come, come!" she whispered. "Now's our time. Jesse James is having it out with grandma and Pete. We'll never have a better chance."

She hurried down the stairs, Tom following.

Instead of pushing on to the bottom of the flight as Tom had done, she paused about ten feet up and running her hand along a partition a little door suddenly flew open revealing the yard beyond.

There was no one in sight; the space between them and the wagon-house was entirely clear.

"Come on," whispered Carrie, and seizing Tom's hand she hurried him across.

They doubled around the wagon house, and presently had gained the rear of the barn.

"I must stop here," said Tom, "I promised to wait for my friend."

"If you do I'll call the James Boys," whispered Carrie angrily. "You're going with me or not at all."

"Oh, you wouldn't do that."

"But I would though. Who is that man anyhow?"

"I told you once."

"Is he one of the gang?"

"Oh, no."

"I believe you lie."

"Don't say that, it ain't lady-like."

"Oh, there's time enough to learn to be the lady after we get to St. Louis. Come on! Come on!"

"How do we go?"

"There's a boat belonging to Pete down at the creek. The creek runs straight down past Montserrat. We can take the railroad there."

Tom began to reflect.

Why, after all, should he wait for Old King Brady?

Actually he knew but little of the detective's character. Once he got his clutches on the money might he not prove as crooked as the rest?

Besides, he might not come at all. He might already be a prisoner or dead.

"Now is my chance," thought the boy; "and I may as well embrace it. Carrie shall guide me to Montserrat. I'll find chance enough to shake her later on."

Did the girl possess the power of reading his thoughts?

Really, in the sight of what subsequently happened, it looked as if she did.

"Are you coming or not?" she demanded.

"If you stay fooling here much longer you won't have the chance."

"I'll come."

"Come on, then."

They hurried down the hill together and reached the shore.

"Where's the boat?" asked Tom.

"It's here somewhere."

"I don't see it."

"Oh, we'll find it. Look along under the bushes. Ain't it lucky that it's stopped raining? Oh, I'm so glad to get away from that dreadful house."

"I should think you might be."

"I am. But say. Shall we stop and get married in Montserrat or wait till we get to St. Louis?"

"Oh, I guess we'll wait till we get to St. Louis."

"Humph! I understand. Then you'll put it off again, Tom. I don't believe you intend to marry me at all."

Tom was silent.

He pretended to be very busy just then looking for the boat.

Presently they found it where Old King Brady had hid it among the bushes.

"Here it is!" he called.

"Oh, you've found it, have you?" said Carrie, hurrying up.

"Yes. Can you get in where it is or shall I work it round?"

"I can get in if you help me," replied Carrie, shyly.

"Without thinking of the probable consequences, Tom hung the pillow-case into the boat and helped Carrie in.

"Hark! What's that? Is some one coming?" exclaimed the girl, suddenly.

"I hear nothing."

"But I do. It's some one coming down the hill. Perhaps it's your friend."

Tom turned to listen.

The instant he did so Carrie seized the sculling oar and pushed off.

"Here! what are you about?" cried Tom, wheeling around, but the boat was already ten feet away from the shore.

"Good-bye!" called Carrie. "I'm satisfied that you're only fooling me. I'll take the money. You can go to thunder! Good-bye."

Tom was furious.

He leaped into the creek, shouting for the girl to return.

The water was up to his neck, and he was glad to scramble out again, for, like too many of our Western boys, Tom Powers could not swim a stroke.

"Carrie, Carrie, come back!" he called. "I am ruined if you persist in carrying out your trick!"

"Oh, go drown yourself! I've as much right to the money as you have! You stole it, anyhow! I'm tired of this life, and I'm going to be a lady. If I can't be one with you I'm going to be alone!"

Poor Tom!

Ill luck seemed to follow him.

He could only run along the bank, shouting wildly for the girl to stop.

She paid no heed to his cries, however, but

kept steadily on sculling the boat down the stream.

Presently the bushes grew so thick that Tom could no longer force his way through them, and was obliged to make a detour around the bank.

When he gained the edge of the creek again the boat was almost out of sight, and he felt just about ready to give up in despair.

It was just then that he heard the loud rattle of horses' hoofs on the hill behind him.

Tom grew wild—insane.

His brain was reeling—he scarcely knew what he did.

To have the money, which had caused him so much misery, in his hands, and then to have it suddenly snatched away was fearful.

Without knowing what he was about, he dashed wildly up the hill just in time to encounter a troop of horsemen, who came galloping along.

"Tom Powers! by all that's wonderful!" cried the leader, a tall, powerfully-built fellow with long hair and the invariable white hat.

"Jesse James!" burst from Tom's pallid lips.

"Jesse James, and no one else, my boy. But in the name of all that's mysterious, what brings you here?"

"The money! The money!" gasped Tom, not knowing what he said or did. "Carrie Mix has got it all. She is escaping down down the creek in a boat."

CHAPTER XXIV.

MATTERS TAKE A DISCOURAGING TURN ALL AROUND.

THE instant the words had left Tom's lips, he was sorry he had spoken.

His wife seemed to return to him all at once. Still one could scarcely blame him.

One look from Jesse James had brought the boy under that strange magnetic influence again.

Strange as it may seem, the outlaw king did possess that power, let those deny it who may.

"What do you mean?" demanded Jesse.

"What money are you talking about?"

"The money that was in the black bag," faltered Tom, who could no more help answering his question than he could have flown.

"You don't say."

"Yes."

"Where did she get it?"

"Mother Mix had it; it was she who stole the bag that night in the hut."

"Well, thunder! what fools we've been!" ejaculated Jesse. "Hey Frank!" he called as his brother came riding forward to ascertain the meaning of the delay; "Mother Mix stole the bag, and Carrie has it now. She's sculling down the creek in a boat."

"Humph!" grunted Frank. "then the best thing we can do is to catch her, I should say, instead of standing here chinning about it."

"How you goin' to catch her? We haven't any other boat."

"Well, we can try."

"Where's she heading for?" asked Jesse, turning to Tom.

"For Montserrat."

"We can't go there, unless we want a fight," growled Frank.

"Tom and me can go into the town alone," said Jesse quickly. "There won't be no trouble in overhauling the gal, for no doubt she'll make straight for the station. You fellows can hang around in the woods just beyond the railroad. Here, give the boy a mount."

There were several led horses behind them—they belonged to the outlaws who had been killed.

Tom presently mounted on one of them, was riding by Jesse's side.

Meanwhile, what about Old King Brady?

Had the brave detective met with such a fate as Tom Powers feared?

Hardly. And yet he had had a serious mishap.

Possibly it saved his life—Afterward the detective derived some slight satisfaction from the thought, although he felt inclined to regard it as a positive misfortune at the time.

No sooner had Tom left the room than Old King Brady succeeded in freeing himself from the clutches of the old woman, who instead of attacking him again, fled shrieking through the door slamming it behind her.

"What's the row?" a stern voice was heard asking.

"Oh, my money! My money!"

"Confound your money. Jesse James has just come in, mother—he's in the kitchen. Shut up your noise and go and talk to him—the whole gang are there—they'll discover our secret unless something is done."

Old King Brady did not hear the woman's reply, but he did hear the sound of retreating footsteps along the hall outside.

For the moment he was safe, once it behooved him to make the best of that moment while he could.

He sprang to the secret panel, but it was closed and fast.

He could not even find the place where it was concealed.

"What can I do?" he thought. "I can't face the whole gang of the James Boys, and that old witch will have them in here in another minute, sure."

He ran to the shattered window and tried to open it.

Here again he failed.

The window seemed to be nailed down. At all events it would not budge.

"What shall I do?" muttered the detective, when his eyes rested upon the cavity beneath the hearthstone from which Tom had taken the packages of bills.

It was not very deep and just about as wide as his body, but what attracted Old King Brady's attention, was a large iron ring fitted into the stone, which formed the bottom of the hole.

"Perhaps that means some way out, or at least the road to a hiding-place in the cellar," he reflected.

He ran forward, bent down, and pulling hard on the ring, drew the big square stone slowly up, revealing to his satisfaction a flight of rough wooden steps below.

"Come, those old Talmages provided themselves with every means of escape," thought the detective, as he dropped through the opening. "With so many secret stairs and panels, it strikes me that the old woman could have made a better disposition of her husband's body than to chop it up and roast it. Probably she was a vindictive old wretch like her sister, Mother Mix."

He had fixed the stone in place by this time, and producing his dark lantern, went creeping down the stairs with great caution.

He found that they led him into the open cellar of the house, right alongside of the big chimney, and he now began to wonder what he should do next.

The cellar was filled with boxes and rubbish of all sorts, but away over at the further end a rough board partition had been strung across, behind which a light was burning.

"Something is going on in there—sure," thought the detective. "While I'm about it, I may as well penetrate a few of the secrets of the place."

He crept cautiously toward the partition and peered through the cracks.

Inside was a large engraver's press, partly set up, seen by the light of a candle which stood on a harrel-head. Old King Brady came to the conclusion that it was a new one.

Probably this was the piece of machinery that Pete Mix had brought in on the wagon that night.

"So this is their game," thought the detective. "Jesse James is shrewd. He guessed right the first time. I wonder——"

"Whack! Whack!"

Suddenly from behind two blows struck with a heavy club descended upon the devoted head of the detective, who, with a groan, sunk down unconscious upon the floor.

"One out," hissed the voice of Dan Talmage. "Confound him, how did he manage to get down here ahead of me? He's dead sure. Now if I can only get those plates which have cost me a good year to engrave I'll make for the woods by the secret door, for I'm afraid it's all up with our plan unless the old woman succeeds in buying off Jesse James, and I've no faith in her ability to do anything of the sort."

Dimly, Old King Brady was conscious of these mutterings, for the notion that the detective had received his death blow or anything like it, was a grave mistake.

But the next moment unconsciousness came again, and when next his senses returned to him the detective found himself alone.

"Great Scott! Am I still here?" he muttered.

"What has happened? What am I going to do? I can't pull myself together and make a move?"

He listened attentively.

All was as still as death.

Behind the partition in the press room the lamp still burned, but there was not a sound to be heard.

Feebly Old King Brady felt for his flask, and pressed it to his lips.

The liquor seemed to revive him, and heedless of his throbbing head he managed to regain his feet.

"I wonder how long I've been here," he thought. "Is it moments or hours?"

There was no one to tell him.

He moved around the cellar, but reach as he would he could find but one outlet, save the one by which he had entered—a staircase leading up to the floor above.

After much cautious listening he ventured to ascend it, and found himself in the kitchen.

It was empty.

The remains of a meal lay spread upon the table, a fire burned in the rusty stove, but there was no one to be seen.

Nor did a careful examination of the various rooms of the house reveal any one.

It was certain that he was alone.

Old King Brady looked at his watch.

It was only one in the morning, and yet since the sun went down it seemed to him that he had lived a year at least.

He could scarcely realize it, and began to wonder if the working the time-piece had received in the lead mine could have affected it; but as he well knew that the case was water-tight, he saw that this could not be.

"They've all gone out of the house unless they're hiding in some of the secret rooms," he reflected.

"Wonder if that boy is still waiting behind the barn with the money? I fear not. This is a wretched turn that affairs have taken, but I must not let it discourage me. I must keep working straight ahead just as though nothing had occurred."

It was a brave resolution, but one hard to

carry out for a man feeling as badly as Old King Brady did just then.

He now hurried back to the kitchen and opening the door, started to step outside, when all at once he stumbled over the dead body of a man.

"Heavens!" he ejaculated, drawing back in horror. "This is the man who struck me down. What a retribution, and so quick!"

He flashed his lantern in the face beneath him.

"Jim McClusky, alias Missouri Jim, alias a dozen other names!" he muttered. "I knew you, my man, by your picture, placed long ago in the New York Rogues' Gallery. So, so! Probably you are the Dan Talmage Jesse alluded to. Counterfeiting comes natural to you—it was bred in the bone."

The man was stone dead—shot through the heart! Near him lay several well engraved plates of treasury notes, taken no doubt from his pockets, which were turned inside out.

"Come," thought the detective. "The James Boys are no queer shovers anyhow. They wouldn't even bother themselves to take those plates along."

He now made straight for the barn, and peered behind it.

There was no one visible, nor had he had expected it.

With a sigh he wondered what had been the fate of Tom Powers and his precious bag.

Now came an exploration of the outside of the premises, but no one could be near.

Pete, Mother Mix, Carrie and Tom, had vanished, the James Boys had gone, although the trampled condition of the yard left ample evidence of their visit behind.

Old King Brady began to wonder what he had better do.

Without a clue to guide him the situation seemed despairing indeed.

Looking under the shed the detective discovered that the buggy was missing, and a visit to the barn showed that the horse was also gone.

Had Pete and his precious mother, alarmed at the death of their confederate, made the best of their escape, or had the James Boys carried them off, and the horse and buggy with them?

It was quite useless to speculate upon the subject. The detective could only guess.

"I've had enough of this place for one night," he muttered. "I believe since it has stopped raining I'll make tracks for Montserrat."

And this was precisely what he did.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN THE WINDMILL.

"WHAT time does the train go down to St. Louis?" inquired a tall, heavily built fellow with long hair and a big white hat, walking up to the station agent at Montserrat that morning at something after three o'clock.

"Four thirty," replied the agent, shortly. He was busy on the platform pulling about some boxes which were to go on the train.

"What time does the Kansas City train go through?"

"Five o'clock."

"Have you seen anything of a girl here carrying a bag made from a pillow case?"

"No, no one of the sort has been here."

"Sure?"

"Don't I tell you? Of course I'm sure, or I wouldn't say so?"

"She may come yet," muttered the stranger, as he walked slowly along to the end of the platform toward the big water tank which stood beside the track.

He had scarcely passed behind it when a tall, elderly man made a sudden dart from behind a

freight car on the opposite side of the main track and gained the water-tank.

Beyond the tank was a windmill, and behind this the sound of horses stamping could be distinguished, as well as voices talking in low but earnest tones.

"Here they are," breathed the old man, who wore the dress of the fakir who had exhibited in Knobnoster the night before. "There they are. I felt sure that it was Jesse James as soon as I laid my eyes on him. And Tom Powers too! Well, well! Could he have captured the boy, or is he really heart and soul with the gang? I'll give him the benefit of the doubt, anyhow, but I must manage somehow to find out what they are talking about, and I will."

Old King Brady—for it was he—crept toward the windmill, a small affair used for pumping water into the tank, and softly tried the door.

It was open, and he entered, creeping cautiously up the narrow ladder, which led to the platform, upon which a portion of the mechanism of the mill was set.

Here there was a window, of the presence of which the detective seemed to have been aware.

It stood wide open, and as he peered cautiously out he saw beneath the heads of Tom Powers and Jesse James.

The detective's heart beat wildly.

How easy it would have been to have finished up the bold bandit chief then?

He trembled at the very thought.

It had been an entire surprise for Old King Brady.

Wearily he had tramped through the woods to Montserrat, meeting with no other adventure than almost running upon Mother Mix and her precious son on the road.

They were in the buggy, or at least had been, for just then it was stuck fast in the mud, and Pete swearing fearfully, had alighted and was trying to work the wheels out.

From their conversation overheard from the shadow of a big oak tree, Old King Brady learned that Dan Talmage had been shot down in cold blood by Jesse James because he refused to show him the counterfeiters' press in the cellar, and that as the outlaws had departed it had been discovered that Carrie was missing.

Mother Mix was still bemoaning the loss of her money, but seemed to find satisfaction, as she said, in having seen the body of "thet pesky feller what tried to rob me down suller stun dead!"

After the James Boys left, mother and son had evidently arrived at the conclusion that they could not light out too soon for health.

So there they were and there Old King Brady left them, wondering what could have become of Tom.

He was none the wiser until he reached Montserrat.

Then fancy his amazement at seeing the boy standing at the extreme end of the station platform talking with no less a person than the notorious bandit king, Jesse James.

Old King Brady was amazed—disgusted.

He stole behind the freight car and watched for what would occur.

Thus he saw Jesse speak to the agent while Tom stepped behind the water tank. Then Old King Brady watching his chance dove into the windmill where we find him now.

"But if I kill him that may prevent all chance of recovering the money," he reflected.

"Who can tell where it is—whether he has it or Tom is working some ruse to save himself and the money at the same time?"

But the first words overheard by the detective showed him somewhat how the land lay.

"She hain't been here nohow, I'm satisfied of that," remarked Jesse. "Carrie Mix is as cute as the next one. She knows she's got a fortune

and you can just bet your sweet life she ain't going to let it slip away from her. If she told you she was coming to Montserrat it's my belief she won't do nothing of the sort."

"Great Scott!" thought the old detective, "has that girl got the money! Well, well. Tom Powers, you are a soft one to let a woman get the bag away from you. Well, well! But such is the way of the world."

He bent forward and listened attentively, anxious not to lose a word.

"We have been fooled, then," remarked Tom.

"Yes, sure. It's my fault. I ought to have known better."

"Where do you think she's gone?"

"On down the creek to Warrensburg, perhaps, or mebbe she turned about after you left her and worked her way up to Knobnoster."

"Would she be there by this time?"

"Pretty nigh. Carrie's as strong as an ox—comes of tough stock."

"The Mixes?"

"Bless you, that girl's no Mix; she's a Talmage. She's the sister of that fellow I told you I shot up to ther house."

"You don't say so!"

"Sure as you live. I've known the whole family for years. Wouldn't have killed Dan only he got so blamed ugly. Besides, I don't want no counterfeiting going on about any of my trails. Tain't the thing, and draws too much attention. Wish ter goodness I had gone to Knobnoster instead of comin' here."

"What! Would you have dared to appear in Knobnoster, again to-night?"

"Certain! Why not?"

"Because of yesterday."

"Oh, bother! Who'd look for Jesse James in Knobnoster now? Of all other places in the whole world that would be the last."

"It would be a bold move."

"Boldness is what I live on, boy. It is my bread and butter, the success of my business. But look here, what shall we do?"

"Don't ask me."

"There's that other money to think of," said Jesse, meditatively. "Frank and me have counted it."

"How much does it amount to?"

"About ten thousand."

Old King Brady thought he could see Tom shudder, and he was right.

"We had best think quick," said Jesse. "If Carrie's gone to Knobnoster she will be sure to take the train there, but whether for St. Louis or Kansas City, no one can tell."

"I suppose it will be the same with Warrensburg?"

"Of course, the same train—either way."

"And what do you propose?"

"Why," replied Jesse, meditatively looking at two fine coal black horses which stood near by. "If I only knew which train Carrie was going to take and from where, the boys should overhaul it. We was going down to Gunn City to do that very business to-day anyhow."

"But you don't know."

"There's the rub. Tom, my boy, I'm afraid we're dished."

"But we've got to do something—we can't stay here."

"Of course not. I'm only waiting for Frank to come back with the grub he went to buy; meanwhile suppose we toss up for it."

"How do you mean?"

"We'll toss twice. Heads for the St. Louis train, tails for Kansas City. Heads for Warrensburg, tails for Knobnoster, d'ye see?"

"Yes, but suppose we are wrong?"

"We've got to take the chances. I'm always lucky and expect to win."

"Then what will you do?"

"If we get Warrensburg we'll lay for the train by Davis' Gully, three miles out of Montserrat on the Warrensburg road, which follows the track mighty close. If we get Knobnoster we'll take it at Cotton Ridge about a mile and a half from here. That's of course if she's coming West—if she is heading for St. Louis and has gone on to Knobnoster we're dished."

"Or if she's in Warrensburg, and is going to Kansas City."

"Of course; it's the same in either case, but we'll haul the train anyhow, and may make a good haul to pay up."

"Well, it's six of one and half a dozen of the other, I suppose," replied Tom wearily. "I never expect to see the money again, anyhow."

"Oh, don't you be so sure about that, boy. If she goes to Kansas City, I can overhaul her yet; but if she chooses St. Louis, I own the chances are rather slim."

"Well, are you going to toss?"

"Yes; here goes. Heads, St. Louis; tails, Kansas City."

Jesse had taken a cent from his pocket, and gave it a flip up into the air.

"Heads!" he exclaimed as it struck the ground. "Luck's against us so far, Tom."

"Toss again," was Tom's reply.

Up went the cent and struck the ground.

"Heads!" cried Jesse.

"No, tails!" said a deep voice above him. "Hand up, Jesse James. This time I've got the drop on you, sure."

The bandit king raised his eyes, but not his hands.

There in the window of the windmill stood Old King Brady not ten feet away from him with a cocked revolver leveled at his head.

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN DAVIS' GULLEY.

JESSE JAMES never winced.

He was well used to that sort of thing.

As for Tom Powers he did not recognize the detective in his new disguise.

"What do you want, neighbor?" asked Jesse, coolly. "Strikes me very forcibly that you've mistaken your man."

"Not much!" replied Old King Brady.

"Hands up! I shan't speak again."

No need.

Bang! Bang!

Two pistol shots rang out and Old King Brady disappeared from the windmill window like a flash.

"Good luck! There's Frank!" cried Jesse as quick footsteps were heard approaching along the platform.

"Quick! quick!" cried Frank, who dashed up to the scene on horseback. "I've nailed that rascal, but there are others coming! Mount and be off."

Jesse sprang for his horse and leaped upon his back.

Tom, on the spur of the moment, could think of nothing better than to follow.

"What's the matter here?" shouted the station agent rushing around the tank.

"James Boys! James Boys!" shouted a man behind them.

Bang! Bang!

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Jesse fired twice and Frank once.

Two shots from the station agent had preceded those of the outlaw brothers.

He had better spared his powder, for he was a brave man.

Those shots cost him his life.

When the three went galloping away, the unfortunate agent lay dead beside the track.

Tom saw it and shuddered, as they went dash-

ing down the Warrensburg road at break-neck speed.

"Oh, God, this is terrible!" he thought.

"They think no more of shooting a man than I would of killing a snake. I'll kill myself. I vow I will, if I cannot shake off these evil men before another day reaches its end."

But to attempt to desert now would have been worse than madness, for Tom's well-trained steed kept close to Siroc, and the slightest move in the other direction would have brought the poor boy death.

"Who was it? Did you see?" asked Jesse. "By the eternal, Frank, it was a mighty lucky thing for me that you happened along as you did."

"No, he was a stranger to me," said Frank; "but do you know, Jess, somehow his face looked familiar."

"Oh, I know him now!" cried Jesse. "He struck me familiarly, too. It's that infernal New York detective, Old King Brady."

Tom groaned.

If he had only known, and stayed behind.

"Impossible!" replied Frank. "Old King Brady's dead. Clel Miller shot him."

"Sure?"

"Well, of course I can't be sure. I didn't see him die."

"I'll bet you fifty dollars that's the man, then. I didn't recognize him at first, but I never forget a face, and now I come to look at his, I may say I'm sure."

"Well, I'll bet he'll never trouble us again," said Frank, solemnly. "I shot to kill that time."

"Bah! You can't tell anything about it. Do you know what I think?"

"No—what?"

"That it was he who came prowling round the lead mine, and no doubt killed poor Joe Jaxon."

"No!"

"Yes."

"I can't believe it."

"Do you know what?"

"What are you driving at?"

"When I was down the cellar at the Talmage House looking at the press I saw that fellow lying, as I supposed, dead on the floor. Dan told me he'd killed him."

"Are you sure it was the same?"

"Sure as one can be. I didn't stop to measure him."

"Well!" exclaimed Frank, "if that don't beat all."

Tom kept perfectly silent.

He had never mentioned Old King Brady's presence in the Talmage house in his account of what had happened to him there, and he was dreadfully afraid lest Jesse should suspect the truth.

But he did not.

Little more was said about it, for presently the conversation took another turn.

"Say!" exclaimed Frank suddenly. "Do you suppose there's any danger of our being followed?"

"Danger, of course, but it ain't likely at this hour."

"Wish to gracions we could get rid of that Knobnoster bank money. I'm padded out so with it in my pockets that I feel like I should burst."

"And ain't I in the same fix?" asked Jesse. "Quit your growling. When will you ever learn to take things as they come?"

"Guess I take pretty much everything that comes my way," growled Frank. "Say, Jess?"

"What is it?"

"Hear anything of the gal?"

"No."

"Didn't come to Montserrat then?"

"It looks that way."

"I knowed it."

"You knew nothing more about it than we did."

"What you going to do anyhow? Give it up?"

"Not much."

"What then?"

Jesse told the plan.

"It's lucky your toss up came Warrensburg then," said Frank, "otherwise we'd have had to double all the way around the village to get to the boys."

"I thought of that. We must be most there now."

"Right around that bend in the road, ain't it?" asked Tom.

"That's the place," replied Jesse. "I'm glad to see you're getting so you can remember localities. Here we are. Now for a break!"

He turned his horse directly into the forest, the others following, and for a short distance they pushed on at a reduced rate of speed under the shadowing trees.

All at once a man sprang out directly in their path, and thrusting forward a rifle challenged them.

"All right, Jem!" shouted Jesse.

"Thet you, cap?"

"You bet!"

"You've been gone a deuce of a while."

"Had to stay till I got through my business. Where are the boys?"

"Back here a piece down in the hollow."

"Shake 'em up, Jim."

"What now?"

"We're going to hang up a train."

"Good enough. Where?"

"Davis' Gully."

"Sent Louis Express."

"You bet."

"Good enough! I'll hev 'em here in no time."

"Do so."

"Comin' down, cap?"

"No. We'll go back to the road and wait for you. We had a little scrimmage up to Montserrat, and may be followed—can't tell."

"O. K.," replied Jim Cummings. "You'll see us with you in two shakes," and he hurried off among the trees.

Jesse now led the way back to the road.

"Let us be as still as mice for a few moments," he said, "I want to listen."

Still in that forest!

It was impossible.

There seemed to be a hundred sounds all about them, and all unnoticed until they stopped to listen, but they were only such as belonged to the forest after all.

Jesse dismounted and bent down over the road.

"What's that for?" asked Tom.

"Because he can hear better," answered Frank. Sound waves started up by horses' hoofs upon the ground, keep near the ground, or at least sound louder. Jesse discovered that long ago.

Presently Jesse returned and leaped into the saddle.

"Hear anything?" inquired Frank.

"No; not a thing."

"Sheriff and his posse must have gone back to Knobnoster then. If they'd stayed in Montserrat they'd surely be after us on the second alarm."

"So it strikes me, but didn't you find out while you were up to Bell's store?"

"Bell didn't know. He was terrible frightened when I waked him up, but he soon calmed down and agreed to let me have whatever I wanted. I asked him about the sheriff. He had heard of

the bank affair and knew the sheriff was in town at sundown, but that was about all he could tell."

"What about the grub?"

"Well, I was to have gone back after it. It's waitin' for me in his stable now, I suppose. While he was getting things put up I thought I might as well go back and get you and Tom, so as we could all take a fair start together—see?"

"It was well you did then, or there'd be a man sick in Oshkosh now."

"There's one pretty tarnation sick as it is, I guess," laughed Frank. "His name was Old King Brady—the deuce knows what it'll be when he gets to the warm place down below."

"Hist!" exclaimed Jesse, "there's some one coming."

"Only the boys," he added, after listening a moment.

Then came a great crashing among the bushes, and eight or ten mounted men cantered out into the road.

"All ready, boys?" asked Jesse.

"Bet yer life," replied Jim Cummings.

"Hey, Clel!" called Frank.

"What's up?" growled the deep voice of Clel Miller.

"Remember that detective you killed up thar by Round City?"

"Sartin. Old Brandy—wuzn't that his name?"

"Old King Brady."

"Yaas. I knowed it wuz something thet sounded like brandy. By time, wish I had a good horn now!"

"That's Clel's worst fault," whispered Jesse to Tom. "He's a downright good fellow, but once in a while he will go on a rip-staving old spree."

"Git out! You're better off when the brandy's out of your reach," replied Frank; "but, as I was sayin' about this man Brady—are you sure you killed him?"

"Yaas."

"How sure?" asked Jesse.

"Waal, I shot him and I seen him fall. You see, cap'n, I wuz on guard and I heerd something, and sez I to myself, sez I, 'Clel, my boy,' I sez, 'thet's some one sure——'"

"Oh, dogone it—don't!" cried Jesse. "If you begin on one of them long-winded stories of your'n, Clel Miller, we'll never overhaul that train in the world. Come to the point. Did you or did you not see him die?"

"Waal, now, cap'n, ez I wuz a-sayin——"

"Confound you, man, you shan't say it. The lightning express is due at Montserrat at four-thirty; it'll be at Davis' Gulley ten minutes later. Answer Frank straight out, can't you? Did you or did you not see this detective die?"

"Waal, by gosh! you do take a feller up short, Jess. I didn't hear his last dyin' croak—no."

"Did you see him at all after you shot him?"

"Waal, no."

"I told you so, Frank," sneered Jesse.

"Burn you, why didn't you tell us this before, Clel?" demanded Frank angrily. "You came running into the cave that night and told us you'd shot Old King Brady, and his body had rolled down the hill into the creek stone dead."

"Waal, thet wuz the truth, Frank, I swar!"

"But now you say you're not sure."

"Oh, bags! you fellers is wors'n a couple of Chicago lawyers!" cried Clel, who was so mixed up that he scarcely knew what he was saying. "Betwixt you an' Jess, Frank, you'll have me looney. What yer drivin' at, anyhow?"

"Simply this, Clel," said Jesse—"your detective tried to shoot me up to Montserrat awhile ago, and came mighty nigh doin' it, too. Frank shot him, and——"

"And mind you," interrupted Frank, "I don't say he's dead. I only say I shot him—that's all."

"Gorsh!" said Clel; "next time I kill a man I won't be sure he's dead until I cut his heart out, and even then I expect he'll come to life agin somehow, jest out of spite."

"Come, come!" cried Jesse; "we've talked enough. Fall in line there. We're off for Davis' Gulley. One moment now! You all know Carrie Mix by sight, don't you?"

Nearly all seemed to answer in the affirmative.

"Well, then, if any one of you come across that gal on the train, and see a big pillow-case stuffed full of something alongside of her, freeze onto the pillow-case like grim death. You needn't mind the gal."

"O. K., cap'n," growled Jim Cummings.

"We'll stop the train on this side of the high trestle bridge," continued Jesse. "We'll let the engine just get within a few rods of the trestle, so't when the engineer stops her he'll be on the trestle. Then there must be some one stationed on the trestle ready to cover him. Frank and me'll attend to the passenger cars; Jim shall handle the smoker, and may take Bill Jinks to help him. Clel and Joe Bostwick can attend to the sleeper, and Tom Powers shall be the man on the bridge to keep the engineer from starting ahead the train. Now, then, one, two, three, and off goes she!"

In another instant the outlaws were thundering down the road.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AN EARLY MORNING ATTACK ON THE ST. LOUIS EXPRESS.

FRANK JAMES did well not to assert too confidentially that Old King Brady was dead.

The fact was the brave old detective had not been hit by the flying bullets at all.

His sudden disappearance from the windmill window was due to a different cause.

It was the first shot fired by Frank that did the business.

It struck the window casing, knocking off a huge splinter, which flying back, took Old King Brady just above the eye.

The pain was excruciating.

It sent the detective reeling backward, and losing his footing he fell upon the platform, narrowly escaping a tumble down the ladder as well.

When he regained his feet and looked out of the window again, the outlaws were thundering through the town.

Old King Brady was furious.

He felt like clubbing himself to think that he had not shot Jesse in the first instance.

"One thing is certain though," he muttered.

"That fellow Tom Powers is a fraud. There can be no doubt about it. In spite of his whining ways and plausible stories, he is a contemptible fraud, otherwise he would never have ridden off with the James Boys as he has."

"And to think that I let him get that money—helped him to do it," he added. "Well, I shall never trust my skill at reading men's characters by their faces again."

He had now gained the platform, where all was confusion.

"What's the matter?" he inquired of a man who went dashing past.

"Man shot by the James Boys. I'm going for a doctor."

"Let me see him," replied Old King Brady. "I'm something of a doctor myself. He may die under the delay."

The man assented, and led the way to the station.

There, stretched upon a settee, lay the unfortunate agent.

"There's no need of a doctor here, my

friends," said the detective, solemnly addressing the few who had gathered around. "This man is already dead."

He turned, and walking out upon the platform removed his hat and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"I feel like a murderer," he muttered. "If I had only acted more promptly and put a bullet through the heart of that scoundrel, the poor fellow inside might be living now."

Meanwhile, people were running down to the station half dressed, all anxious to learn the meaning of the shots.

"I must think quickly," reflected Old King Brady. "No doubt the James Boys believe they have done for me this time sure, and will attempt to carry out their original plan of robbing the St. Louis express."

And he resolved to prevent this if it lay in his power to do so.

"Hello! Here comes Squire Jacobs!" cried some one, as a big, pompous, red-faced individual came bristling up.

"Who is Squire Jacobs?" inquired the detective.

The man addressed stared.

"Waal, sir, he's one of our best citizens, sir. He's been to Jefferson City twice from this district, sir. You must be a stranger in these parts not to know Squire Jacobs. Why, he's the biggest man in town."

"And the very individual I'm looking for," thought Old King Brady.

In a moment more he had the big man button-holed, and was telling him as much of the business as he thought best for him to know.

"Humph!" exclaimed the squire. "It's a fortunate thing you didn't shoot Mr. James, sir."

"What?"

"I say it's a fortunate thing that you did not shoot Jesse James."

"Pardon me; you said Mister James."

"That was a slip of the tongue," replied the squire, reddening. "Fact is, neighbor, you Yankees don't understand our people. If you had killed Jesse James I doubt if they would have allowed you to escape with your life."

"Thank God, I don't understand you!" cried Old King Brady. "Do you mean to tell me, sir, that the honest citizens of Montserrat would for an instant uphold a man whose hands are so deeply stained with blood as are those of Jesse James?"

"I repeat, sir," replied the squire, "that you don't understand our people. Not that I am not an advocate for law and order, but there are others who think that the James Boys are brave men. They are no friends of mine, sir, but they have suffered wrongs, sir—ahem! yes, sir, they have suffered wrongs. There is no denying that."

Old King Brady could not refrain from uttering an exclamation of deep disgust.

"And do you mean to say that you are willing to do nothing to prevent this train robbery from taking place?" he asked.

"What can I do, sir? I am not the sheriff of this county."

"But you are an honest man, I hope."

"That has nothing at all to do with it. Besides, if the James Boys do attack the train they will only rob a lot of Yankee drummers after all."

"Sir," said Old King Brady, quietly. "You amaze me. We will not discuss the question further, however. Answer me one question, is the sheriff of Knobnoster still in town?"

"No. He went back an hour ago."

"Is there a sheriff at Warrensburg?"

"Yes."

"His name?"

"Platt—James Platt."

"Enough. One word before we part: as sure as there is a heaven above us I'm going to publish this interview with you in both the St. Louis and Chicago papers at the earliest opportunity. Good-day."

"If you dare do that, you blarsted Yank, I'll shoot you at sight," blustered the big man.

"You see me now, sir!" cried Old King Brady, turning suddenly upon him. "You see me now."

"You shall hear from me, sir, you shall hear from me," muttered the squire, backing away.

"Bah! Go drown yourself, you wretched windbag!" flashed the detective.

Probably Squire Jacobs did not act upon Old King Brady's advice, although he suddenly disappeared from the neighborhood of the station, and was seen no more.

"I see very plainly that I've got to act on my own account," muttered the detective. "There's no assistance to be had from these benighted people, that's flat."

He hurried back inside the station where the telegraphic instrument could be heard clicking, encountering the baggage-master just coming out the door.

"I want to send a message to Warrensburg at once," said Old King Brady.

"Impossible," replied the man. "There's no one to send it. Bill Mims was the only man in town that understood telegraphing, and he's dead."

"Meaning the agent who has just been shot by the James Boys?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll send it myself."

"Do you understand the machine, squire?"

"Yes."

"Fire ahead for all me, then. While yer talking with Warrensburg I wish you'd tell 'em that the St. Louis express is half an hour late. Poor Mims was just going to send word down when he was took off."

Old King Brady hurried to the telegraph office.

His knowledge of telegraphy was decidedly limited, but it was still sufficient to enable him to accomplish his end.

"If I only knew the Warrensburg call," he muttered.

"I know that much," said the baggageman, who was looking over his shoulder. "It's Wg."

"W. G.! W. G.! W. G.!" rattled out the old detective on the instrument.

"How are you, Mortserret?" presently came ticking back.

"Mims dead. Killed by James Boys," Old King Brady ticked back. "See Platt, sheriff. Have him with a posse at bridge across Davis' Gully. James B. going to rob St. L. Ex. Ex. half an hour late."

"What did you tell him?" asked the baggageman, inquisitively.

"My message," replied Old King Brady, with a bland smile.

He now walked quietly out upon the platform and lit a cigar, feeling that there was nothing further to be done.

He cared but little to wait for an answer, for might not the station-agent at Warrensburg be another "friend" of the James Brothers? Who could tell?

Presently the instrument began clicking furiously.

"Say, that's our call," said the baggageman, approaching. "They are trying to talk to you."

Old King Brady hurried back.

"Sheriff seen. Will be on hand," came the answer as soon as he had replied to the call.

"I hope it's true—that's all," muttered Old King Brady, as he walked away.

Just then an old ramshackled, mud-bespattered buggy came rattling up.

Old King Brady could scarcely refrain from laughing as Mother Mix, wearing a big poke bonnet and a faded shawl, alighted amid many sighs and groans.

"Now take that team 'round to Briggs' stall and tell 'em to look out fer it until they hear from me, Petey," he heard her say to her hopeful son. "Guess I don't want ter lose that tew, after all I've lost this ere blessed night."

"Guess it ain't your'n, nohow," growled Pete. "B'longs ter Dan, an' he hain't likely to want it no more. I'm going ter sell the rig out'n out ef I git ther chance, mother, you bet."

"An' rob your poor old mother. Hold on, Pete! You shan't do it."

"Oh, go west," snarled Pete as he drove away.

Old King Brady laughed heartily.

He had no fears of being recognized by Mrs. Mix in his present disguise, and it would not have disturbed him much if the contrary had been the case.

The old woman muttering to herself, vanished inside the waiting room after purchasing two tickets for St. Louis with a great number of ten cent pieces drawn reluctantly from an old stocking.

The sight of so much small coin made the baggage man who was attending to the ticket office swear.

"So she's bound for St. Louis, is she," thought the detective. "Well, let her go. I have no time to bother with her at present whatever, I may later on."

Half an hour after time the express came thundering in, and Old King Brady made for the smoker, after seeing Mrs. Mix and Pete enter the first passenger-car.

He quietly took a seat and waited for the conductor to begin his rounds.

Presently the man appeared and commenced collecting tickets.

He was a small man of slender build, but he looked like an intelligent person, and he had a determined eye.

"I want to speak to you a moment, sir," whispered the detective, as he handed his ticket. "Sit down here. I don't care to be overheard."

"Can't do it now," replied the conductor. "I've got to collect my tickets."

"But—"

"Can't stop to talk," snapped the man, moving away.

Old King Brady leaned over and caught him by the arm.

"The James Boys are going to hang up your train at Davis' Gully," he whispered in his ear.

The conductor turned deathly white, and moving back, dropped down beside Old King Brady.

"Who are you?" he asked in a tremulous voice.

"A detective."

"Ah! How do you know?"

"It would take too long to tell you. I know; that's enough."

"It may be a fake."

"It is no fake."

"What can I do?"

"I have already telegraphed Warrensburg to send a sheriff with an armed force to meet us at the bridge."

"Good!"

"Will he come, think you? Or is he like the rest of these Missourians?"

"That's the trouble," whispered the conductor. "You can't depend upon none of 'em where the James Boys are concerned. But I know Platt. He's a brave man, and I hope he'll do his duty—that's all."

"How about the operator at Warrensburg? My assurance that the sheriff will be on hand comes from him."

"Oh, he's straight. He's a Chicagoan, an honest young fellow, and not in sympathy with the James Boys, the Yonnger gang, or any other infernal band of Pikers in the State."

"You're no Missourian, I judge."

"No, I'm from Iowa, but Missourians are not all as bad as your tone would seem to imply, neighbor. There's lots of brave and honorable men in this State, and too many of them lazy, long-haired suckers who'd rather kill a man than eat a breakfast any day, if there's anything to be gained."

"I hope you're right," said Old King Brady, "but my experience out here has rather shaken my faith, I must confess."

"What had we better do?" asked the conductor, uneasily. "Remember we've only a minute or two to decide."

Old King Brady ran his eye over the crowd in the smoker.

The survey was discouraging.

Long hair and big boots certainly prevailed.

"You won't get any help from these fellows," said the conductor, quickly, "and there ain't no use in expecting it—they're a blame sight more likely to side the other way when it comes to a pinch."

"What can we do, then? There's the express messenger and the baggage-master, I suppose, and—"

"Hold on," whispered the conductor, glancing out of the window uneasily, "I tell you what you do. Skip back into the sleeper. There's a good load of Boston and New York drummers on board—they'll fight and must be awakened at once. Choke the porter if he makes any fuss."

"And you—"

"I'm going for the engineer instanter. Beside the express messenger must be warned. Between ourselves, mister, there's half a million in gold bars going on from Denver to New York on board this train!"

"Great Scott!" breathed Old King Brady, almost bounding from the seat.

"It's so; they must be defended. I'm off. I may not appear, but I shall be on the lookout and ready to move the train, if I can. If they shoot the engineer and scare off the fireman, you'll find me with my hand on the throttle or dead on the track."

"One moment!"

"Be quick. We're within a mile of Davis' Gully now."

"Is there a girl back there with a big pillow-case bag?"

"Yes. How'd you know?"

"Guessed. Where did she get on?"

"Knobuoster."

"Ah!"

"What of it?"

"She's a thief, that's all."

"You don't say!"

"It's so. What car is she in?"

"Last passenger car—that is the first one before you come to the Pullman. I thought there was something wrong with that girl first off, for she was wet to the skin. Now I must go. Don't breathe a word till you get to the sleeper. Tain't likely they'll interfere with the regular cars anyhow, for it's only the country folks who ride in them on these through trains and most all of 'em are the James Boys friends—especially the women, the blamed fools."

Rising, the conductor hurried through the baggage-car, while the detective made the best of his way to the rear.

He passed Mother Mix and Pete in the first car.

The old woman was "jawing" poor Pete at a tremendous rate.

"Probably," thought the detective, "he sold the team. Gracious, if she only suspected that

Carrie and the pillow case were in the car behind here, wouldn't she get up and dust?"

He sped by unobserved, and entered the car behind.

"Now there's no time for useless talk," he reflected. "I've got to settle Carrie's business as quick as a wink."

He ran his eye through the car, catching sight of the girl half way down the aisle on the left.

She was sitting alone with her head leaning against the window. Old King Brady could see nothing of the pillow case bag at first, but when he reached the seat there it was standing on the floor beside her.

The time for action had come.

Old King Brady deliberately leaned over and grabbed the bag.

"Don't you make a sound, Carrie," he whispered. "I know you. You might lose all this money. I'll take care of it now."

Carrie gave one scream, glared wildly at the detective, and dropped in the seat, seemingly in a dead faint.

The occupants of the adjoining seats moved up and stared curiously, but Old King Brady was already half way to the door.

"Stop him! He's robbed me! Stop that man!" he could hear Carrie screaming, as he hurried through.

"She's a bold one and may make me trouble yet," thought the detective. "I suppose the whole car will be after me in a minute, but they won't get the bag unless they kill me first. Now then, to warn them in the sleeper."

It was the next car, and Old King Brady pushing on across the platform hastened through the door.

"Ticket, sir!" exclaimed the porter, blocking his way.

Old King Brady sent him reeling against the washstand with one hand and pushed on.

"Hyar, boss! You kean't come in hyar without a ticket!" roared the porter.

"Gentlemen!" shouted Old King Brady, in a voice which must have penetrated behind every curtain in the car. "Gentlemen, the James Boys are about to attack this train. I advise you all to get up and dress as quick as you can!"

The effect of this startling announcement was electrical.

In an instant the peaceful Pullman was changed into a pandemonium of the most decided sort.

"James boys! Oh, my golly!" cried the porter, making a wild dash through the car.

It was quite evident that he took Old King Brady and his pillow-case for a part of the notorious gang.

Shrill-voiced women shrieked, men with voices deep down in the bass swore.

Curtains were thrust aside, and the frightened passengers dropped out of the berths, looking wildly about for the outlaws and asking each other where they were.

It was a comical sight that display of a very necessary article of male attire.

There were red drawers, white drawers, blue drawers and brown, and one long-legged individual with a fiery red head and a freckled face, displayed a pair of a bright pea-green.

"Humph," grunted the detective. "A countrymen of mine. I'm afraid, and he strode forward, passing frightened faces thrust out between the curtains, which drew back in terror at his approach.

"Vat's de matter! Who said Schames Boys!" snapped a little Jew, whose curly head and hooked beak protruded from between the curtains of an upper berth. "Oh, Gee!" he cried suddenly catching sight of Old King Brady, "here dey come now. Oh! Oh! Don't shoot!

don't shoot! I gifes up all-I got. It pelongs to de house und I won't lose noting by it myself."

"Get inside there! Hold your jaw!" cried Old King Brady dealing the coward a smart slap across the face, which sent the Jew howling into his bunk.

"Gentlemen!" he called aloud. "I am not one of the James Boys. I've simply been sent by the conductor to warn you. Gentlemen, we must fight!"

"That's sol!" cried a big drummer in bright red drawers.

"Begobs, an' we'll wipe the flure wid 'em!" cried the man with green drawers. "I've got tree revolvers, b'yes, if any man is lacking let him spake."

"That's the talk!" cried the detective. "Our green legged friend has hit the key-note to the situation. Let us show ourselves men. Here, some of you quiet the women. Three or four go to the rear door, the rest of you come with me to the front."

Some sprang to obey, others crawled back into their bunks again.

Green legs joined Old King Brady at the front door, which at the same instant was flung open and two men came rushing in.

"That man is a thief!" shouted the foremost. "He has just robbed a poor girl in the next car. Help me, some of you gents, to take him in charge."

The words were hardly uttered before the train began to slow down.

Loud shouts were heard outside and several shots rang out upon the still night air.

"Get back there! Don't you lay hands on me, sir!" cried the detective, pushing back his accuser.

"James Boys! James Boys!" yelled some one. The two men fled back within the car.

By this time the train had stopped.

"Got your gun ready, Paddy?" whispered Old King Brady.

"Faith an' I have, but don't ye be after blagarding oul Ireland, or I'll be tempted to use it on you."

"Whist now!" whispered the detective, "and don't be after making an ass of yerself. It's many a time I've tramped the bogs of Ballinasloe, an' if ye're not a Tip there's no pretty girls betwene O'Connell and Cork, an' God knows that's a lie."

"Faith an' I'll show you whether a Tip can fight or not!" cried green legs, brandishing a huge six-shooter valiantly. "Come on wid yer James Byes! Come on wid 'em an' I'll—oh, musha! Here's wan of 'em now!"

A tall man, with a big white hat and long hair flowing down his back, had leaped upon the platform of the Pullman, rifle in hand.

"Bang? Bang! Bang! Bang?" sounded quick shots further along the train.

"Gentlemen, I'll trouble you to lower them irons!" cried the stranger, sternly.

Crack! went Old King Brady's pistol.

He recognized the fellow the instant his feet touched the platform.

It was Jesse James himself.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"CASHIER, YOU'VE GOT THE BAG
MOUNT QUICK YOUR LITTE NAG!
HO! HO! FOR CANADA!"

ALAP-ATA—lap-ata—lap!

That's the way the rattle of the horses' hoofs sounded to Tom Powers as the outlaw band went galloping down Warrensburg road.

And the sound seemed to fall in harmony with the beatings of his heart as he rode along, a prey to a feeling of deep despair.

"It's my last day with the James Boys," he reflected. "I have sworn it. I'll kill myself if I can't shake them in any other way."

As they rode on poor Tom's reflections became of the most despairing nature.

It seemed to him that fate for the past few weeks had been making a perfect foot-ball of him, knocking him this way and that.

Still the boy was physically stronger.

Jesse James had extracted the bullet from his hip as skillfully as a surgeon might have done, and with it the pain and feverishness to a great extent disappeared.

"How are you feeling, Tom?" asked the outlaw, as they at last reached a point where the road descended abruptly into one of those deep gullies so common in Missouri. Through the bottom of the gully a small creek flowed.

"Better, but awfully tired."

"Brace up, my boy."

"I'm doing my best."

"If you were only as tough as I am now. I've been in the saddle for days together and wounded, too, never even sleeping except on Siroc's back."

"I shall never ride like you, captain."

"Oh, hang it all, call me Jesse, boy. I'm Jesse to my friends, and by Jupiter, you're my friend. I like you, blame me if I don't. Brace up, and in time you will be as tough and hardy as any member of the band."

Just then a bridge appeared before them crossing the stream.

"Hold up!" cried Frank, reining in suddenly. "Ain't this Davis' Gulley, Jess?"

Jesse looked about them narrowly.

"Guess it is," he replied. "I warn't never here but onct before, but I kinder guess it's nothing else."

"We orter be sure."

"On, I'm sure; anyhow it's a gulley, and the railroad not far away."

"Might as well tap the train one place as another, I suppose."

"It's all the same," said Jesse; "to the right, boys, we'll soon be able to tell, for if it's Davis' we'll come to the big trestle bridge." It proved to be Davis'.

Dashing down the slope the outlaws followed the creek through the woods for about half a mile, when suddenly a huge trestlework rose up before them, dimly seen in the darkness.

"That's it!" cried Frank. "This is the spot."

"Jest so," replied Jesse. "Now then, boys, to your places. Who's going to undertake to flag the train?"

"I'll do that," said Bill Jinks who was looking longingly at the creek as though he'd like another bath.

"And so you may," replied Jesse. "Get the lantern out whoever got it. Now then, Tom Powers, come with me."

There was no answer.

"Blame it, where is the boy?" cried Jesse, turning around abruptly.

He was amazed to see Tom's horse standing without a rider.

Tom had utterly disappeared.

Where was he?

No one had seen him.

Jesse swore, as the Missourians say, "like all possessed."

"The consarned, white-livered little skunk!" he stormed, "he's funk'd out as sure as shoot-in'! By the living powers, ef I don't shoot him down in his tracks first sight! Tom! Tom! You little varmint, you jest come back here."

But the only answer was the sighing of the wind through the trees.

"It's my oplulon that boy's never been with us heart and soul at no time," growled Jim

Cummings. "I allus said so, and I'll stick tew to it till the last."

"I don't believe it," cried Jesse, as ready to defend his favorite now as he had been to attack him before. "Mebbe he's turned faint and tumbled off somewhere back. One of you fellows scour 'round and look."

But it was useless to look.

The further they searched the less likelihood there was of finding Tom, for the boy was in full hearing at that very moment, crouching in a thick stump of bushes not five feet away from his horse.

His heart beat wildly. It really seemed as if he could not stand the strain another moment.

If ever Tom Powers displayed true courage it was then, for he knew well that to desert at such a moment and be discovered meant simply death.

But he had taken his resolve, and on the spur of the moment seeing the backs of all the outlaws turned toward him, acted upon it.

He would not be a party to another scene of highway robbery and murder come what would.

Therefore Tom had slipped off his horse and backed slowly toward the bushes.

The plan had succeeded and there he was.

"Kean't find hide nor hair on bim," reported the man, returning presently.

Jesse was furious.

Frank solemnly muttered, "I told you so," which, by the way, he had not done at all.

Just then the rumble of the train was heard in the distance.

There was no more time to be lost.

"Come on," cried Jesse. "We must get to business, boys. Fate will throw that fellow in my hands yet."

"I pray to God it never may be so cruel," breathed Tom, as they rode away.

He peered out from among the bushes, and seeing that the coast was clear, stole down the slope toward the creek.

"I'll put the bridge between us while there's time," he reflected. "I shali be safe so. I can't save the train, so I may as well try to save myself."

He stepped into the creek boldly.

It was not very deep, not above his waist at any point he struck, and he had no difficulty in gaining the shadow of the huge trestle, which he reached just as the train went thundering over his head.

Bang! Bang!

Two shots rang out.

The train had stopped.

"That's the engineer down and perhaps the fireman," thought Tom. "Thank God I had no hand in this."

But the train had not been stopped at the point Jesse had planned.

Tom saw that at a single glance upward, for the larger part of the cars were above his head.

It had stopped now, however, and cries and loud shouts mingled with shots told him that the attack had begun.

"Come on, boys! Come on! There they are!" a loud voice was heard shouting.

The voice came from beyond the engine on the other side of the bridge, and presently the tramp of feet could be heard.

There seemed to be a troop of men running across the bridge.

Bang! Bang!

Bang! Bang!

Bang! Bang!

Shots rang out thick and fast.

Suddenly the body of a man went whirling down past Tom, and plunged into the creek with a terrific splash.

Tom clutched a post, trembling in every limb.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

Down dropped another man, striking the water with a despairing yell.

"Show them no mercy, boys!" shouted the voice already.

Just then something else dropped.

It was no man this time, but a well-stuffed pillow-case, which landed in the water right in front of Tom Powers, almost striking him on the head.

"Great heavens! it's the bag!" breathed Tom, clutching it.

He was not mistaken.

It was the bag he had filled with the funds of the Coyote Bank.

CHAPTER XXX.

OLD KING BRADY CAPTURES JESSE JAMES.

THE words of the sparkling French ditty quoted at the heading of the last chapter, certainly did not suggest themselves to Tom Powers, as the pillow case bag and its precious contents came tumbling into the creek.

We only quoted them because they seemed applicable to the situation, as Old King Brady would have viewed it just, then, could he have known what had happened. As Jesse or Frank James might have viewed it; as nine out of ten—no, let us hope no more than six out of ten—men in the sleeper of the stalled express might have viewed it; had they been put in Tom Powers' place.

Now, strange enough, such a thing as appropriating the funds of the Coyote Bank to himself had never occurred to Tom at any time.

He was weak enough to fear the James brothers, to allow himself to be drawn under the magnetic influence of Jesse, and forced to lend himself to his iniquitous schemes, he had been foolish enough to trust Carrie Mix's protestations of affection, which were probably never genuine, but simply trumped up for the occasion to serve her own interests; but to keep the money—never!

It never entered his head for an instant to do anything of the sort.

Meanwhile, as Tom grabbed the bag the firing continued; shouts and screams, curses and groans filled the air. It was impossible to tell which side was getting the best of the desperate game.

Suddenly Tom saw two men come flying down the bank a little beyond the trestle, clenched in each others arms.

They were Old King Brady and Jesse James.

It was a desperate struggle going on between them—a struggle for life or death.

Almost at the same instant there seemed to be a general stampede down into the gully further along the track.

Bang, bang!

Bang, bang!

Thick and fast the shots were ringing, and amid the uproar came the loud clatter of horses' hoofs over the limestone rocks which formed the bottom of the gully.

The James Boys' gang was in full retreat.

"Give it to 'em! Give it to 'em!" Bang, bang!

"Let 'em have it?" crack, crack!

"Show 'em no mercy, boys!" Pop, Pop!

These and similar sounds were what Tom Powers heard.

Now, for once, the boy had displayed both good judgment and shrewdness.

"They'll start up the train in a minute," he reflected. "My place is on board. I'll be safer there than anywhere else."

Unless he should be recognized as the advertised bank robber from Coyote, or the confederate of the James Boys in Knobnoster.

It made him shudder to think of this, but he resolved to take his chances, just the same.

If he could only get on board all right, if only the train started all right, if only everything went all right, then by noon he could be in St. Louis, and beyond the reach of Jesse James forever more.

Three great big ifs!

They were enough to deter a braver heart than Tom Powers possessed; but, on the other hand, Tom had become desperate and nothing short of a loaded cannon could have stopped him now.

He plunged on through the creek, passing under the trestle and gaining the shore, began to climb up the bank on the other side.

"Great Scott! Suppose some of the sheriff's men see me and take me for one of the gang?" flashed across him, sending a cold chill down his spine.

"I won't go into the passenger coach at all—I'll appeal to the express messenger," he suddenly resolved.

Gaining the track in safety, he ran along to the front of the train and leaped upon the express car, dashing wildly in at the door.

Bang!

The instant he crossed the threshold a pistol shot whizzed past him, narrowly missing his head.

"Stand back!" yelled a little man frantically. "You can't come in here! By thunder! I'll shoot the first man down who dares to pass the door!"

"Hold on! Hold on! For Heaven sake don't shoot me!" shouted Tom, advancing instead of retreating. "I'm in a worse fix than you are, conductor! By gracious I am!"

It was the brave little conductor and no one else.

He stood over the dead body of the express messenger as pale as death and as determined.

"I've just shot two of them fellers, and dumped 'em into the creek," he said, grimly. "You may say your say, young man, but if you're one of 'em I want you to understand you've got no chance in here."

"I'm not one of 'em!" cried Tom. "I'm charged with carrying some money to Mr. Mortyard, the Chicago banker. See, it is here. Help me for God sake to keep it safe, or I'm ruined for life!"

"And I've got half a million in this here car," replied the conductor. "They've killed poor Jack Jones, burn 'em! But before I'll report to the super that I've lost that gold I'll blow my brains out—see?"

It was hard to tell which was the most desperate man of the two.

"Look here! I know that pillow-case bag!" cried the conductor, suddenly. "A girl had it back there a few minutes ago."

"Yes, yes," said Tom, tumbling to the fact that Carrie must be on the train. "Listen just one moment and I'll tell you."

He made a hurried explanation, which was partly true and partly false—a neat little story, which seemed to fit the situation, about being lost in the woods and being robbed by Carrie. Of course he couldn't mention the James Boys, but he said he had hidden under the bridge at the moment of attack, and told how the pillow-case had dropped down upon him.

Another might have doubted, but the conductor believed him.

Again that honest, frank expression of countenance, which Tom certainly had, stood him in good stead.

Just then a brakeman came running up with great news.

The gang were in full retreat pursued by the sheriff; the engineer, who had deserted his engine at the first alarm, had now re-appeared.

and there was nothing to hinder the train from starting ahead at once.

"Thank God it's over!" breathed the conductor.

For a moment he seemed to hesitate as to what to do.

"Look here, young man, what's your name?" He asked suddenly.

"Thomas Mortyard," replied our hero promptly.

His full name was Thomas Mortyard Powers, so actually he did not lie there.

"Are you really the nephew of Mr. Mortyard, the Chicago banker?"

"Upon my word, I am."

"Let me look in that bag."

Tom opened the bag promptly, displaying the packages of water-soaked bills.

"Say," whispered the conductor, "I'm going to trust you with a big responsibility."

"You may."

"There's half a million of gold in them boxes, I must run this train to St. Louis. Jack Jones is dead; there's no one I can leave in charge here, so I've made up my mind to leave you, for I believe your story, and you seem to have as much at stake in your way as I have in mine."

Ten minutes later Tom Powers was rattling on toward St. Louis.

He was alone in the express car—alone with the dead.

He, the companion of the James Boys, the man advertised as a defaulter and a bank robber, was in charge of over half a million of other people's money!

It did, indeed, seems strange.

Meanwhile, how had it fared with Old King Brady?

If Tom could have only made a tour of exploration through the train, he would have been startled at seeing the brave old detective seated calmly in the smoker, puffing away at the inevitable cigar, with no less a personage than the bandit king, securely handcuffed by his side.

Yes, Old King Brady had done it.

He actually did capture Jesse James that night at Davis' Gully.

Now for the first time is this important episode in the great outlaw's history made known to the world.

Only a thin partition divided the detective from Tom Powers, yet neither suspected the presence of the other, and perhaps after all it was just as well.

In fact no one on the train, save the conductor, knew that Jesse had been captured, for as it happened not a soul in the smoker even knew the outlaw by sight.

They understood that the stern old man was an officer, and that his prisoner was one of the bandits, but they knew nothing more.

The struggle between Old King Brady and the outlaw chief had been a desperate one.

But for "green legs," who had dashed Jesse's revolver away, it would have terminated at the very outset, and the detective to a certainty been killed.

Then they clinched—Old King Brady and Jesse.

Together they fell from the steps to the sleeper, and went rolling down the steep incline locked in each other's arms.

Tom had seen them fall, but he had not seen the end of it.

Don't ask us to describe that very desperate struggle which followed, for we cannot.

Even Old King Brady himself, from whom we have obtained the notes upon which this tale is based, firmly avows that he has no recollection of what happened after they struck the ground.

All he knew was that after a few brief moments

which were to him a blank, Jesse James lay handcuffed before him.

Lying beside the outlaw on the grass were two revolvers, and the three huge bowie-knives, "all of which," says Old King Brady, "I must have unconsciously wrenched away."

Naturally Old King Brady felt that he had done a big thing, and so in truth he had.

Apart from the satisfaction of having captured the notorious bandit there was the \$50,000 reward, the standing offer of the State for Jesse's capture.

Rich as he was, Old King Brady by no means despised that consideration, you may rest assured.

"Get up," he said, sternly. "Your band is in full retreat. You must come with me."

Jesse never said a word.

He slowly rose and stood beside the detective, eying him coolly.

"Stranger, I wish I could shake hands with you," he said deliberately. "There's only one man in this world bigger than Jesse James in my estimation, and he's the man who can put the bracelets on him. By the eternal, I wouldn't have believed it, but you're the identical man."

"I think you know me."

"I do."

"I was sure of it."

"You are Old King Brady, the New York detective."

"Right. March up that bank. Your men have deserted you, my friend. Your day is over. March up the bank there—you and I go to St. Louis in that train."

"Mr. Brady," said Jesse, "looker here."

"What?"

"I'm wuth money."

"So am I."

"I'll give you five thousand dollars, and I've got it about me, if you'll take them Irons offer my wrists."

"Where did you get the money?"

"What does that matter? But we're alone and you can't use it agin me. If you want to know so bad, I got it from the Knobnoster Bank."

"How much are you worth altogether, Mr. James?"

"Waal, I don't know that's any of your business. If my offer ain't big enough, I can double it, only I can't pay you all down, but Jesse James' word is as good as his bond."

"You must be a little off, my friend," said the detective, "how about the \$50,000 reward from the State?"

Jesse looked confused.

"I forgot that," he said, "but look here, you shall have \$50,000 if you'll let me go. Frank shall produce it at any address you may name within a week."

"Enough of this nonsense!" cried the detective. "You get up that bank. Lively now. Don't say another word. If you were to offer me a hundred thousand, and display the cash, it wouldn't tempt me to take those irons off your hands."

Jesse sullenly ascended the embankment, Old King Brady, stopping only to gather up the small arsenal he had left behind him, following on.

"Get into the smoker," he said, quietly, "and when you are in march straight to the closet."

Jesse obeyed.

He could do nothing else.

When a few moments later the pair took their seats in the car, Old King Brady and not the outlaw had the \$5,000 belonging to the Knobnoster bank in his clothes.

No wonder the old detective felt satisfied with his work.

Still the rose was not without its thorn. Never think it—it never is so in this world.

Do not for an instant fancy that the detective had forgotten that the precious pillow-case had been recovered only to be lost again.

It seemed almost a miracle that he and the outlaw had not tumbled into the creek after it, but the bag must have struck the edge of the trestle and rebounded, while the two men, clearing it fell straight down.

And now the loss was recalled by the first remark of Jesse, made in a tone of malignant satisfaction just as the train began to move.

"Say, Mr. Brady."

"Well, what is it?"

"How about that pillow case you had in your hand when I first tackled you on this train?"

"Well, what about it?" asked the detective, coldly.

"Got that from a gal, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Carrie Mix?"

"Yes."

"Is she on board?"

"Yes."

"Do you know a feller named Tom Powers?"

"Yes."

"Then you know what was in the bag?"

"Yes."

"Was it you who came snooping round our camp at the old lead mine last night, disguised as one of my men?"

"Yes."

"And you who tried to shoot me out of the windmill window?"

"Yes."

"How many lives have you got, anyhow?"

"Well, they say I've got nine like a cat."

"By Judas! I should think you had. What became of Joe Jaxon?"

"Find out!"

"Did you shoot him?"

"Find out!"

"How did you get away from the lead mine?"

"Find out!"

"Did you tumble in the shaft, really?"

"Yes."

"And still escaped?"

"Yes."

"Great Snakes! I can hardly believe it."

"It's a fact."

"Did you see Tom Powers up at Mix's?"

"Yes."

"Did he say anything about me?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"None of your business."

"Cool! That boy is game, anyhow. I'll believe in him till I know he really deserted—not before?"

"What! Was Tom with you to-night?" asked the detective.

"I've a good mind to answer same as you did me. None of yer business," said Jesse, "but I'll be more perlitte, and tell you that he started out with us, but we missed him just before the train came along."

"Ah! And you didn't see him again?"

"No."

"Is it true that your brother Frank and yourself nursed that young man, and that he joined your band?"

"Yes."

"Is it a fact that he took part in the Knobnoster Bank robbery?"

"None of your business."

"Do you consider him one of you now, Mr. James?"

"Yes."

Old King Brady sighed.

He had tried to believe in Tom Powers but his faith had been sadly shaken.

Meanwhile the train rattled on.

It continued to rattle on until they reached St. Louis, and still Old King Brady never guessed that Tom Powers and the bag were on board.

Not so with Tom, however.

When they reached Sedalia the conductor came to him and informed him of Jesse's capture.

He had telegraphed ahead when the train stopped at Warrensburg for another express agent to take charge of the gold, and thus Tom to his great relief found the responsibility of its care removed.

About noon the train went thundering into the Union depot at St. Louis, and two persons experienced a feeling of intense relief.

One was Old King Brady, the other Tom Powers.

Tom, who had remained with the new express messenger, now leaped out of the car, anxious above all things to avoid being seen by Old King Brady, hurried to the street.

He made a bee-line around the nearest corner, and dove into a small Jew clothing establishment.

He had thought it all out, and knew just what he was about to do.

"I want one of those big gripsacks," he said. "How much are they?"

"Three tollar," replied the Jew, "and so scheep—oh, my, so scheep!"

"I'll take one."

The gripsack received, Tom hastily jammed the pillow-case inside of it, the Jew watching him curiously all the while.

"Now, I want a suit of clothes, a pair of boots, and a big cowboy hat," said Tom; "be as quick as you can, please."

He was in a tremendous hurry.

In twenty minutes the next train for Chicago over the C. and A. would leave the station, and Tom had resolved that he would be on board.

The Jew flew around and took his measure, showed him a room where he could change his clothes, and in fifteen minutes Tom Powers stood a transformed man.

"How much do I owe you?" he asked taking out a roll of money, which he had taken the precaution to put into his pocket.

"Two hundred tollars, my tear—dat's all," smiled the Jew, rubbing his hands.

"Why, you outrageous old swindler!" cried Tom. "What do you mean?"

"Schoost say dot again und I calls a copper!" shouted the Jew. "Swindler, eh? Come, I like dot. Young veller, I knows you. You're a tief. I hellup you to disguise yourselluf mit mein clothes. Hein! Den you pay mein brice or I'll call dot copper und ve'll see vat you carry in dem billowgases already yet—ain't id so?"

Tom turned pale.

"There's your money," he said, throwing half a roll upon the counter, and as the Jew picked it up grinning, he rushed from the store without another word.

He never stopped to buy a ticket, but made straight for the parlor-car of the Chicago express and leaped on board.

"Ticket, sir!" cried the porter.

Tom flung the fellow five dollars and dashed on.

He had just time to gain the smoking compartment when the train started.

As it rumbled on toward the bridge—before it was fairly out of the station, in fact—two men suddenly came hurrying into the smoking compartment of the drawing-room coach and slammed the door.

Tom looked up anxiously—he was fearful of every one now.

To his utter dismay he recognized in the fore-

most of the new-comers Jesse James, while the man who pressed close behind him was his brother Frank.

CHAPTER XXXI.

OLD KING BRADY LOSES HIS GRIP.

"WELL, Brady, you've bagged me. Here we are in St. Louis. Now what are we to do?"

It was Jesse James who spoke, as he stretched himself with a yawn.

The train had entered the Union depot at last, and was slowing down.

"I'm going to take you to the office of the chief of police and turn you over to his tender mercies," said the old detective. "I've got other business to look after, and am anxious to see the last of Jesse James."

"By Judas! if I happen to escape, you'll find it's very far from the last you'll see of me," sneered Jesse. "I swear right now and here that I'll have your heart."

"All right," laughed Old King Brady; "get it if you can. You're hungry and tired and cross now, my friend. You'll feel better by and by."

"Say," growled Jesse, "can't you fix it so every one won't see these irons, Brady?"

"Oh, yes, I guess so," replied the detective good-naturedly. "Here, let's have your hands. Now I'll pull off your coat and throw it loosely over your shoulders—so. Now, you see, it conceals your hands to a great extent. Folks will think you've got a broken arm."

"Looks a blame sight worse than it did before," snarled Jesse. "But let's go on anyhow, or we'll be the last out. Of course you'll take a hack?"

"Oh, yes."

"I suppose nothing would induce you to give a fellow a drink or some breakfast?"

"Breakfast I can't give you without unhandcuffing you, and I don't propose to risk that, but you shall have a drink now."

He produced his flask and Jesse took a long pull.

Then together they stepped from the train and passed out to the back stand.

Old King Brady, holding Jesse's arm, walked to the nearest hackman, who was haggling with a man and two women, and looking over their shoulders, said:

"I'll take you, cabby, if you're not engaged."

"Step right in, gentlemen," cried the driver.

"No, ma'am, I can't do it, and there ain't no use talking. Take you away up to the Four Courts for fifty cents! Think I see myself. Stand one side and let these gents pass."

It had been done in a hurry.

There was no other hack very near, and Old King Brady was anxious to be off.

It was that hasty act which upset all the detective's plans.

The elder of the two women turned suddenly. She was a horrible old toothless hag, wearing a big poke bonnet and a faded shawl.

"What ye mean by trying to cut me out?" she cried. "I want ye to understand—"

"Lorzee! Jesse James!"

She roared it right out loud enough for all the world to hear.

It was Mother Mix, and those with her were Carrie and Pete.

"That's the man who stole the money from you, gran!" yelled Carrie.

"Get in!" whispered Old King Brady to Jesse, pushing him through the open door of the hack.

Ignoring Carrie's remark, the detective got out to follow.

Then a very singular scene took place.

Mother Mix, seizing Old King Brady by the coat-tails just as he was stooping to enter the

hack, gave utterance to a vicious screech—a real old Missouri yell.

"Come out'n thet, ye dogoned, pasty-face, white-livered skunk!" she roared. "I want my money—I want my money! Choke him, Jess! He'll go fer yer ef yer don't! They say he's a detective. I know he's a dogoned thief!"

In vain Old King Brady tried to pull away from her.

It was useless.

Carrie and Pete had taken a hand at the coat-tails now, and their united strength had drawn him back.

Just then Old King Brady saw something which made him willing to sacrifice every rag on his back. That is, he would have done so cheerfully if he could have prevented it, but he was late.

The door on the opposite side of the hack had suddenly opened, and a man's face appeared.

In an instant Jesse leaped toward him, and was dragged through the door and disappeared.

Old King Brady gave one cry of furlous rage and tore himself away from his captors.

But something else tore just then.

It was the tails of the old detective's coat.

They gave way so suddenly that Pete Mix fell sprawling upon the pavement, the old woman fell on top of Pete, and Carrie went down to complete the pile to the intense amusement of the bystanders, who did not understand what the circus was all about.

"Thieves! Murder! James Boys! Fire! Police!" yelled Mother Mix. "Lorzee, Carrie, ye've busted my fall bonnet. Stop that man! He's robbed me! Oh, lorzeel what shall I do!"

Meanwhile, Old King Brady, minus his coat-tails, had dashed around the hack in a hurry.

He had abundant reason for his haste, for the man who had come so unexpectedly to the outlaw's assistance was none less than brother Frank.

Of course he must have come down on the train, but no one had ever suspected it.

Frank looked solemn enough to be a parson, and as he had picked up some one else's hat and turned up the collar of his coat, he managed to pass for a respectable citizen—actually, he had passed Old King Brady in the smoker more than once.

It was a bold move and a successful one.

Outside the hack stood an immense number of wagons, drays, private carriages, etc., all jammed in together.

Frank and Jesse dodged among them, running beneath the wagons, under the horses' feet—any way, every way—suffice it to say they managed to give Old King Brady the slip.

But for Mother Mix they might not have succeeded.

"That's the man! That's the man!" yelled the old harpidan, who had regained her feet. "He's a thief! He's robbed me! Stop him! Stop him, I say!"

Unfortunately for Old King Brady there was a policeman in among the crowd of wagons, and he caught the detective by the throat.

This settled the business.

By the time explanations were made, the James Brothers were nowhere to be seen.

Old King Brady was in despair.

He hurried to the station only to meet the conductor of the Kansas City express hurrying out.

"Mr. Brady! For heaven sake, what has happened?" he demanded. "Do you know I just saw two men looking marvelously like Frank and Jesse James board the Chicago Express on the C. and A.?"

"Has the train gone?" demanded Old King Brady.

"Just pulled out a minute ago."

"Why didn't you stop them?"

"Didn't realize who they were until it was too late," replied the conductor, "or you can bet your sweet life I would."

"Jesse managed to escape me," panted Old King Brady. "Great heavens this is too provoking. What shall be done?"

"Give it up. I'm awfully sorry. Hold on a minute though. Perhaps I can find out where they are bound."

He hurried to the ticket office, followed by the detective, who could not keep still.

"Yes," said the ticket agent, "two such men as you describe bought tickets here for Chicago."

"For Chicago!" cried the detective.

"Yes; I noticed them particularly, because one of them seemed to be handcuffed. The fellow who bought the tickets said he was a detective taking a prisoner over. But what's the row? Is there anything wrong?"

Old King Brady did not answer him.

Seizing the conductor by the arm he drew him away from the ticket seller's window.

"Look here," he whispered, "when is the next train for Chicago?"

"The quickest you can go on any line is three o'clock," was the reply.

"And it's now twenty minutes to one. That won't do."

"But what can you do?"

"You are acquainted with the superintendent of the C. and A?"

"Oh, yes."

"Is he a reasonable man?"

"Very."

"Take me to him at once," said the detective. "I'm going to charter a special train."

And precisely this is what Old King Brady did, but it was 1:30 before the engine and single car made the start.

Two St. Louis detectives accompanied Old King Brady.

He had secured their services in a hurry, resolved to risk nothing, for he intended to overhaul the noon express before it reached Chicago, and capture the James Boys on board the train.

But he had slight hopes after all, deeming it probable that the brothers would quit the train at Bloomington, and shifting to the Kansas City division return to Missouri and their native haunts.

Alas for Old King Brady's energy and boasted luck.

Two miles outside of Atlanta a broken rail sent the Chicago special toppling over into a ditch.

No one was injured most fortunately, but the three detectives were the sickest kind of men.

Tired and disgusted they tramped into Atlanta, and were forced to take the regular three o'clock express from St. Louis.

Most decidedly Old King Brady had lost his grip.

CHAPTER XXXII.

WITH THE JAMES BOYS AGAIN.

It did begin to look as though fate was against Tom Powers, and that he was never to be able to "shake" the James Boys. It did, indeed.

The instant the brothers entered the smoking compartment of the drawing-room car Frank bolted the door and wheeling round to Tom presented a cocked revolver at his head.

"Say, young fellow, if you squark once you die," he hissed. "Now mind. This gentleman and me have got private business here, and you're going to witness it. Respect your life and keep mum."

It was very dark, for they had not yet reached the bridge which crossed the Mississippi to East St. Louis.

To this fact Tom owed it that his identity was not suspected.

Not daring to move, the boy made no answer. He guessed what that private business was.

Jesse sat down and Frank promptly removed his brother's coat.

Then producing a sharp file, he went to work on the handcuffs with so much energy, that he had one hand free before it became necessary to open the door for the conductor on his rounds.

"Keep the other hand in your pocket, and I'll tackle that as soon as I can," he whispered.

Jesse arose, put on his coat, and Frank producing cigars, the brothers settled themselves back and began to smoke.

Seeing that they were not paying any attention to him, Tom thought it would be a good time to get out, so he picked up his bag and moved toward the door.

Then, and not till then was he recognized.

"Tom Powers! by all that's holy! Look, Frank, look!" Jesse exclaimed.

Tom sank back in his seat in despair.

Just then the conductor looked in and took tickets.

Not a word was said until he had gone.

"Have a smoke, Tom?" asked Frank, opening the ball.

"No, thank you, I don't care to smoke," replied Tom.

"Look here, boy," said Jesse in that kindly voice which he knew so well how to assume when he chose, "perhaps you'll be able to give some explanation of your presence here. I've tried to believe in you, and I want to keep on doing so to the end."

"I'm here because I'm tired of knocking about the country," replied Tom, gloomily. "You can't make an outlaw of me, and there's no use to try."

"Then you deserted at Davis' Gulley?"

"Yes, if you call it so. I never promised to stay with you. I don't like the sort of life you lead."

"That's all very well, but don't you think you might have mentioned that you were going?"

"I might have done so—yes."

"Why didn't you?"

"Because I thought you'd object."

"Which I certainly should have done most seriously. I should have shot you dead."

"I don't doubt it."

"Do you know what happened afterward?"

"Yes."

"I suppose you came to St. Louis on the same train with us?"

"Yes."

"Where were you?"

"In the express car."

"Was the messenger killed?" inquired Frank.

"I shot him, but just then I heard Jesse give the call, and I lit out."

"Yes, he was dead."

"Do you know what was in them square boxes?" questioned Frank.

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"Half a million dollars in gold on the way east from Denver."

It was a bit of triumph from which Tom could not refrain.

"Holy ginger!" cried Frank. "Jesse, if we'd only know'd."

"We couldn't have done no different if we had," replied Jesse. "There ain't no use of cryin' over mashed eggs. Tom!"

"What?" asked Tom trembling.

"I've a good mind to kill you."

Tom was silent.

"I'd do it, only I don't care to attract attention just now," continued Jesse, "but mind, I'll do it yet."

"It wouldn't pay you."

"Revenge always pays me. I was like a father to you, boy, and I consider that you've went back on me. I don't allow no man to go back on me and live—never did."

"We can't kill him now, brother," put in Frank, "unless we want to fight the whole train single handed, and I'm not quite ready for that."

"I don't intend to do it now. I'll wait my chance," continued Jesse. "Meanwhile, Tom, what hev you got in that black bag?"

"Some clothes I bought in St. Louis," replied Tom, still trembling.

"You must have been blame spry about it then."

"I was in a hurry to catch the train."

"Where did you get the money? Last time I saw you you hadn't a blame cent."

"The conductor on the Missouri Pacific gave it to me for watching that gold."

This was not true.

The conductor had given him nothing but thanks.

"What!" cried Frank, "did you watch the gold?"

"I did."

"Haw, haw, haw! that's a good one. Was it in bars or coined?"

"How do I know? I didn't see the inside of the boxes."

"I believe you lie. I believe that's where your money came from," sneered Frank. "Let's see what sort of clothes you bought."

"You mustn't touch that bag!" cried Tom in desperation. "I ain't going to be dictated to by you any longer, Frank James. I—"

"Open the bag, Tom," said Jesse firmly, at the same time fixing his magnetic eye upon the bag.

Tom was in despair.

He did not obey, but he offered no objection when Frank leaned forward to open the bag.

"Great snakes! It's that there piller case full of money!" cried Frank in amazement. "Who'd ever beliven the boy had so much into him?"

"No!" cried Jesse.

"But it is though."

"But I saw Old King Brady drop it with my own eyes. It struck the trestle as it fell and tumbled down into the creek."

"Don't care. It's here now!" cried Frank.

"Les see," said Jesse, leaning forward.

What possessed Tom?

Was he suddenly acquiring a bolder spirit?

Both the brothers were bending over the bag now with their heads close together. They were also on the inside nearest the window, while Tom was nearest the door.

Suddenly Tom gave Jesse a violent push.

The bandit king fell against Frank, and just then the train, which had been standing at a station gave a sudden jerk, and over went the brothers, one on top of the other, while Tom seized the bag, all open as it was, and bounded through the door.

"Save me! Save me from the James Boys," he shouted, as the drawing room conductor tried to stop him.

"Are you crazy?" cried the conductor.

But Tom was already past him, pushing the man against the stove and almost setting him on fire, which caused him to leap back against the door of the smoking compartment, and this brought him in sudden and violent contact with Mr. Frank James, who at the same instant came dashing out.

Down tumbled Frank on top of the conductor and on top of both Jesse came sprawling, his dangling handcuff striking the conductor in the eye.

"Oh, gee! Ouch—oh, my eye!" roared the conductor.

And he added some other and stronger expressions which we think it best not to repeat here.

By the time they had got disentangled, the train was well under way.

"Where's that lunatic? Where's that boy?" cried Jesse, whose ready wit was equal to anything.

"Do you mean a young fellow with a black bag?" asked the regular conductor, who just then happened to enter the door.

"Yes, yes. He's a lunatic. I'm taking him to the asylum at Kankakee. See, he was handcuffed to me; but while I dropped asleep the sly rascal managed to get the key away from me and unfasten his wrist, and now he's run off with my bag."

"He jumped off the train just as it was pulling out of the station," said the conductor.

"Well, then, I s'pose there's no help for it," said Jessie, coolly. "Here, Mr. Brown," he added, turning to Frank, and extending his manacled hand. "See if you can't get that bracelet off with that file of yours."

And the whole passenger list of the drawing-room car watched the operation of filing off the handcuff, never dreaming that the two men were the notorious James Brothers, the terror of railroad riders throughout the West.

"He'll go straight to Chicago by the next train," whispered Jesse. "He ain't got wit enough for anything else. We will go right through, Frank; meet him at the depot and give him a surprise."

And when the operation of removing the handcuff was completed the brothers settled themselves quietly down for a smoke.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CONCLUSION.

"STRANGE that we don't hear any news from Old King Brady the detective, is it not, Ethel?" remarked Mr. Mortyard, as the noted Chicago banker in company with his pretty niece entered their house at midnight on the day of the events just described.

They had been spending a pleasant evening at McVicker's, and were now just returning. The servants were all in bed, and when Mr. Mortyard opened the front door with his latch-key they found that they had the sumptuously furnished parlors entirely to themselves.

"But I'm sure we will, uncle," replied Ethel, tears filling her eyes. "I'm sure we will hear from Mr. Brady, but as for poor Tom I know he must be dead or he would have found some means of writing to me before this."

"I have my doubts about the boy. I have my doubts," said the banker. "I tried to believe in him that night the detective talked to us here—great heavens, Ethel, who can that be ringing our bell so furiously at this hour—this unseemly hour of the night?"

"Was it an inspiration which seized Ethel Mortyard just then?"

Positively it looked very much that way, for she sprang past her uncle without a word and flung open the front door.

"Tom!" she cried. "Oh, Tom!"

A young man wearing the dress of a western cowboy, and clutching a heavy grip sack dashed past her into the room.

He was pale and haggard. He staggered like a drunken man—seemed scarcely able to stand.

"There's the money! Uncle John!" he cried, flinging the bag at Mr. Mortyard's feet. "It may not be all there, but most of it is. Shut the door for God's sake. Lock it! bar it! The James Boys have chased me all the way from the C. and A. depot. I have just managed to give them the slip."

"Thomas! You! What—ha—are you talking

about?" began the banker in his usual slow way. "The James Boys in Chicago! Ridiculous! Hum—ridiculous. I——"

"Will you close the doors?" gasped Tom; "I positively can't move."

Ethel sprang toward the door to shut it, but she was too late.

Two men had already reached the top of the steps, and roughly pushing the girl aside dashed into room.

They were big strapping fellows, both, and each held a cocked revolver in his hand.

"Pardon the intrusion!" exclaimed the foremost, "but our business is pressing. You've led us a long chase, Mr. Tom Powers, but now we've got the drop on you. I'll trouble you fur that bag."

"Jesse James!" gasped Tom, and he made a motion to rise.

The effort proved too much for him.

Beside the weakness produced by his wounds the boy had not tasted food for twenty-four hours.

Poor Tom!

It was his last effort.

He fell fainting to the floor.

"Help! Murder! Police!" shouted Mr. Mortyard, running to the partly open window.

Bang! went Frank's revolver, shattering the pier glass and bringing the banker to the right-about-face.

"Croak again and I'll send the next shot through your heart, old man," he shouted. "Jesse, have you got the bag?"

No, Jesse had not got the bag.

Ethel, heedless of the risk she ran, had valiantly seized it, and rushing to the back parlor gaired the hall.

"Stop that girl!" cried Jess. "Head her off, Frank! We'll have the whole neighborhood alarmed in a moment!"

The brothers sprang into the hall.

"Halt!" cried a stern voice right before them.

At the outer door which was still wide open three determined men stood with cocked revolvers aimed directly at their heads.

"Up with your hands, boys!" cried the well-known voice of Old King Brady. "This time I've got the drop on you and no mistake!"

Bang! bang!

Before the words had fairly left his lips the brothers fired.

Bang! bang!

The answer from Old King Brady's revolver came at once.

Alas! for the efforts of the old detective.

The James brothers were hard to capture—harder to hold once captured, and hardest, hardest of all to kill.

"Make a rush, Frank!" shouted Jesse, as one of the St. Louis detectives dropped, and even Old King Brady himself went reeling down the steps.

With the blood streaming from a wound in his arm Frank James dashed out of the house, Jesse following.

Bang! bang!

Bang! bang!

Flat on his back on the sidewalk, Old King Brady fired two shots again, and two more from Jesse's revolver broke the silence of the night.

Useless waste of powder.

In the darkness accurate aim was quite impossible.

As he staggered to his feet, Old King Brady could hear the ring of the bootheels of the outlaw brothers upon the pavement as they dashed around the corner and disappeared.

* * * * *

Time, two weeks later.

Scene, the banking office of John Mortyard & Co. on La Salle street.

Persons present in the banker's private office, Old King Brady, looking thinner and very pale, Tom Powers, in about the same condition, and Mr. Mortyard himself.

"This—ahem—this check Mr.—hum—Brady," the banker was saying, as in a slow and methodical manner he tore the check from its stub, "this check for—hum—\$5,000, I regard as but a slight return, sir, not to say—ha—recompense, for all the trouble and danger to which you have exposed yourself in defense of my nephew, and the—hum—funds of my Kansas Bank."

"I cannot accept it, sir," replied the detective, warmly. "My mission was practically a failure. I did but little to assist Mr. Powers. His own courage and that of your pretty niece, Miss Ethel, saved the funds of the Coyote bank."

"On the contrary, uncle," put in Tom, "Mr. Brady was of the greatest assistance to me more than once. I doubt greatly if I should have ever got away from the James Boys but for him."

"For which reason I insist upon Mr. Brady's acceptance of the—hum—check," repeated Mr. Mortyard. Here it is, sir. Take it, and with it my sincere thanks."

"No, no. I can't take it," replied the detective, firmly. "But for the cowardice of those St. Louis detectives I would have bagged the James Boys, as it is——"

"As it is one of them is in the hospital with a wound in the hip, and the other in the graveyard. We need not consider them at all," put in Tom. "I think, Mr. Brady, you positively owe it to yourself to accept that check."

"No, no."

"What, not after the wound you received? Think. Jesse James shot you in the side—the shot might have killed you—you are only just out of the hospital yourself."

"But I cannot do it."

"But think of all the expense you have been put to?"

"True. The cost of that special train was heavy. But you, too, Mr. Mortyard, have been put to some expense."

"It is—hum—nothing," said the banker. "To be sure I have paid the balance of the money taken from the Knobnoster Bank, which with what you took from Jesse—ha—Jesse James, Mr. Brady, makes that institution whole."

"And which must be charged against me," broke in Tom. "Now that I am your partner, Uncle John, I shall refuse to draw a cent of the profits of the business until that account is squared."

"You certainly should pay it, Thomas," said the banker gravely. "You are morally responsible for that robbery. You should not have allowed yourself to be led about by the nose by Jesse James."

"Don't let's talk of that any more. I feel like a man who had been insane."

"And you have been through quite enough to make you so," said the detective, "but do you know, Tom, there is one thing I can't understand?"

"What is that?"

"When you jumped off the train you must have boarded the train which left St. Louis at three o'clock and——"

"And you, who boarded the same train at Atlanta, never saw me. No matter. I saw you."

"Where were you?"

"In the express car. I happened to meet the messenger, who came aboard the Missouri Pacific train at Sedalia that night. He recognized me at once. He was coming over to Chicago with his friend, the C. and A. messenger, and he kindly consented to let me ride with him."

"Ah, then that accounts for it. To be sure, my thoughts were not on you just then. How

strange that I did not see you at the station. You see, I only had eyes for Frank and Jesse. Not expecting to see them, I hurried away, and it was only by the merest accident that I happened to spy them stealing after you when you had almost reached Mr. Mortyard's house."

"And a very lucky—ha—a very lucky accident it was for all of us that you determined to visit my house, in spite of the lateness of the hour," said Mr. Mortyard. "Mr. Brady, you and I will certainly have a—ha—a quarrel, if you persist in refusing that check."

"Do you know what became of the Mixes?" asked Tom, as the detective silently shook his head.

"Oh, yes," was the reply. "A letter received from the chief of the St. Louis police, yesterday, told me all about them."

"What?"

"Pete and the old woman were caught passing counterfeit money, and are now under arrest. Carrie, it is said, is going on the stage."

"Ridiculous!" cried Tom.

"That's what the letter said. But, look here, how about your cousin, Henry Mortyard?"

"Oh, I have—hum—fired—I mean discharged—him," said the banker.

"Then I suppose his chances of marrying Ethel are slim?" smiled the detective.

"Decidedly slim, Mr. Brady," said a laughing voice behind them. "I am engaged to marry Tom. I see you are not quite up to date."

Unseen by any one, Ethel Mortyard, looking rosier and more charming than ever, had just entered the office unannounced.

"Oh, Ethel, I'm glad you have come!" exclaimed Tom. "Here, add your persuasion to ours, and make Mr. Brady accept this check."

Ethel glanced at the check which still lay on Mr. Mortyard's desk.

"It's altogether too small," she said, pertly, "but you always were stingy, Uncle John. Mr. Brady, don't be stubborn. I order you to take that check and put it in your pocket this very moment."

"But, my dear young lady," began the detective.

"Obey me, sir!" cried Ethel, stamping her foot with all the airs of a queen.

"Well, I make it a rule always to obey the ladies," sighed Old King Brady, taking up the check and putting it in his wallet. "I don't feel that I have earned it, but——"

But if we don't stop somewhere we shall never be able to write

[THE END.]

THE BELT OF GOLD

OR,

OLD KING BRADY IN PERU.

By A NEW YORK DETECTIVE,

Author of "A Pile of Bricks," "A Bag of Shot; or, Old King Brady Out West," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE TRAGEDY OF THE BANK.

"If you have got any of Ackerman's paper, or any deposit in the Twenty-fifth National Bank, I advise you to get rid of the one and get hold of the other as quick as you possibly can."

The speaker was a Hebrew—a small note-shaver in Wall street, who came rushing into Warner & Root's brokerage office one scorching afternoon in August, 1880, at a little before four o'clock.

"What's that?" called Mr. Warner, adjusting his gold-rimmed eye-glasses, as he came hurrying out of the bank office. "What's that you say, Mr. Meyer?"

"I say if you hold any of Ackerman's paper you'd better drop it, and if you've got any money in his bank you'd better get it out," repeated the Jew. "It is all over the street this afternoon that Ackerman's in trouble and the Twenty-fifth National is going up before the end of the week."

Mr. Warner turned pale.

"It's a lie—it must be a lie!" he exclaimed, pulling off his eye-glasses with a quick, nervous movement. "Some one has been humbugging you, Meyer. Why, Ackerman's note's good as gold."

"Just as you please, my friend," returned the Jew, with a shrug of the shoulders. "Once you did me a good turn, Mr. Warner—I try to do you one now. I'm so sure that what I tell you is true that I've dumped \$10,000 of Ackerman's paper at \$4,000 discount already. If you don't believe me why good-day."

"Hold on!" cried Mr. Warner, but Meyer was already through the door of the office and up the steps. Evidently miffed at the manner in which

his intended friendly warning had been received he hurried off down Wall street without even looking around.

"It's all nonsense—rubbish!" exclaimed Mr. Warner, angrily. But it was noticeable to the clerks that he gazed anxiously across the street at the twelve-story marble building in which the offices of the Twenty-fifth National Bank were located.

"Don't you think it's nonsense, Mr. Stubbs?" he added, turning to his cashier, an elderly person, with an exceedingly bald head, who stood busily writing at a high desk behind the office rail.

"No," replied Mr. Stubbs, laconically.

"Why, what do you know about it?"

"Nothing," said Mr. Stubbs.

"Then why do you express an opinion?"

"Because you asked me."

"Don't be an idiot, Stubbs."

"Thank you, I won't."

"Come!" cried the broker, testily. "If you know anything, out with it!"

Mr. Stubbs put his pen behind his ear, from which repository, owing to the lack of hair, it immediately fell to the floor.

This was the regular habit of Mr. Stubbs. He usually did it at least a dozen times a day.

"I only know that every man who is worth more than a million, unless he got it by inheritance, is a thief," he said, dryly, as he stooped to recover the pen. "Ackerman is rated at two millions; therefore I'm willing to believe him capable of any rascality. On general principles I believe what Meyer said."

"Come, come!" puffed Mr. Warner. "I'm worth over a million and a half myself."

Mr. Stubbs fixed his big blue eyes upon the

broker for an instant. Then, with a grunt, began writing busily in his book.

Evidently Mr. Stubbs saw nothing to disturb his theory in the fact that his employer was worth a million and a half.

"But it's simply impossible," continued Mr. Warner, flushing slightly and beginning a hurried walk up and down the office. "I've known Ackerman for fifteen years—ever since he first appeared on the street, in fact. Why, he's honesty and uprightness itself. A man of more regular habits never existed. At his desk every morning at nine sharp, he goes out to lunch precisely at one, leaves the bank on the stroke of four, dines at his club at six exactly, and I can swear is always in bed by nine. Then beside that he is a widower, and has absolutely no extravagant tastes. Why, he don't go out one evening a month. Sticks close to his rooms in that old-fashioned house of his in lower Fifth avenue, and—by George! here comes Nibson. He ought to know."

A short, thickset florid man, with a decidedly English appearance was just descending the steps.

Now there were few men in New York at the time of which we write, better informed concerning the ways of Wall street than Mr. T. Ramsly Nibson, the noted lawyer of Broadway, whose specialty had been for years the defense of rascally speculators when any of their victims were foolish enough to throw good money after bad by bringing their grievances before the courts.

It was therefore quite obvious that Mr. Warner was right. If Nibson confirmed the rumors concerning the Twenty-fifth National Bank, of which Mr. Charles Ackerman was president and principal

pal stockholder, it was certainly time to make a move.

Nor was Mr. Warner's anxiety without foundation, for not only was he a heavy endorser on his neighbor's paper, but he was likewise a director in the Twenty-fifth National, about whose affairs he knew no more than a child.

"I say, did you sell those Burlington bonds?" panted the lawyer, as he entered the office mopping his head with an immense handkerchief of rich silk.

"Yes, 163 1-2," replied the broker. "Look here, what are these stories about Ackerman—is there any truth in the rumor that he's gone up?"

"They say he's involved," replied Nibson.

"To what extent?"

"Can't tell you. I only heard the rumor today."

"Thunder and lightning! It's a bad business for me!" exclaimed Mr. Warner. "Wonder if he's across the street now? I think I'll just step over and see."

But he was prevented in this by the entrance of a rich customer, who engaged his attention.

"I'm going over myself, Mr. Warner," interrupted the lawyer, after waiting a few moments with evident impatience. "I've got something in there, and I'm a bit nervous about it. I'll drop back and let you know how Ackerman talks."

"Wish you would," was the reply, as Nibson hurried away.

From the position in which he stood conversing with his customer in an undertone, Mr. Warner could watch the movements of Nibson without difficulty.

He saw him cross the street and ascend the steps of the building opposite, and then—it seemed scarce five minutes later—he saw him come rushing out again apparently very much disturbed.

For a moment he stood on the sidewalk looking wildly up and down, then making a dart up Wall street, he presently returned with a policeman, and both hurriedly entered the bank.

What was the matter?"

Evidently something of an unusual nature had occurred.

The movements of the lawyer and the policeman had attracted the attention of others—already a crowd was beginning to collect—men and boys were running up the steps and pushing their way into the bank.

It was too much for Mr. Warner.

He could stand it no longer.

A few hurried words served to communicate his excitement to the customer, and both started across the street on the run.

"What's the trouble?" he demanded, elbowing his way through the excited throng which had collected at the end of the main room of the suite occupied by the bank.

The matter was murder.

To Mr. Warner's horror, he saw, lying stretched upon the floor, with face white in death, the body of Peter Maxwell, the trusted cashier of the Twenty-fifth National Bank—a man whom he had known intimately for more than fifteen years.

CHAPTER II.

MR. ACKERMAN WALKS OUT.

"Ack, 'ack, 'ack! 'Ave an 'ack, sir? Take you right up Fifth Av'ner, Metropolitan, Brunswick—all the hotels."

The noise and confusion at the White Star pier from which the passengers of the incoming steamer, having escaped the Custom House officials, were beginning to hurry, was enough to drive one unused to such scenes stark, staring mad.

"Ack, 'ack, 'ack!" the jehus of the various conveyances were crying, persisting in pressing about those who ventured to run the gantlet between them, and it is probable that the young man wearing the dress of an English tourist, who confidently handed his traveling bag to the first man he encountered, did the wisest thing, for after that the others drew back and made room for him to pass.

"Where to, sir?" demanded the driver, opening the door of his rickety vehicle and placing the bag upon the seat.

"You may take me to the Twenty-fifth National Bank, on Wall street," was the answer.

Then the door was slammed and the hack rolled away.

When it reached the bank the young man leaped out, and seizing his bag ran up the steps with as much confidence as if he had owned the entire institution.

When he handed his card through Mr. Maxwell's little window, which, by chance, happened to be nearest the door, the old cashier stared.

"My father—can I see him?" demanded the young man, impatiently.

"I presume so—he is alone in his private office. I don't doubt that he will be greatly surprised. Why, it's only last night I sent you a draft for £500 and —"

But the young man was already out of hearing. Hurrying toward the door of the bank president's private office he opened it without ceremony and pushed his way inside.

It was shortly after one o'clock on the afternoon that witnessed the tragedy at the bank.

Seated at a desk in the most comfortable corner of the office was a tall, spare man of uncertain age, busily examining a huge pile of securities—bonds they appeared to be—which he seemed to be checking off from a written slip, depositing each one as checked in a long satchel of alligator skin, which stood upon a chair drawn up close to his own.

Evidently he was not pleased at the interruption, for at the sounds accompanying the young man's entrance to the office he started nervously, and made a move as though he would have closed the rolling top of the desk, thus concealing the bonds. Then seeing the uselessness of such a move, he wheeled about and frowningly regarded his visitor beneath his bushy, black eyebrows with anything but a pleasant expression over spreading his face.

"Did you wish to see me, sir?"

A bucket of cold water dashed in the face of the young man could not have dampened his ardor more effectually.

"Father—don't you know me?" he said, in a choking voice.

The face of the bank president became as pale as death.

Surprise, then rage, lastly secret satisfaction expressed themselves upon his countenance, and all seemingly in the same instant of time.

"Talbot!" he exclaimed, springing up. "No! It can't be you!"

"But it is, father. I am certainly Talbot Ackerman, or at least I was when I left Liverpool ten days ago."

Mr. Ackerman's countenance still retained its pallor.

"In God's name what brings you here at this most unfortunate time?" he faltered. "I wrote you yesterday. Talbot—I sent you money—bless my soul, who would ever have thought of this?"

Then to the infinite surprise of his son, Mr. Ackerman dropped into his chair and for an instant buried his face in his hands.

Certainly no one would have suspected for an instant that this pair were father and son.

There was not a feature of resemblance between them.

While the bank president was tall and stout, and a most decided blonde as to skin, hair and eyes, Talbot Ackerman was as dark as an Indian, with hair of that dead black which one sees only in the Spanish-Italian races, and it would have been impossible to fancy blacker eyes.

And yet, despite of his foreign appearance, Talbot was as thoroughly English in his whole manner as in dress and speech; and here, also, was another marked point of difference, for the father was obviously an American and a New Yorker. A shrewd observer could never have taken him for anything else.

"What is the matter?" stammered Talbot, entirely overcome by this strange reception. "I wrote you that I was coming, father. Didn't you get my letter?"

"And I wrote to you not to come," was the hurried answer. "Didn't you get mine?"

"No."

"Ah! I should have cabled. In that letter I told you that I was about to take a run over to London and would join you in a few weeks."

"I wish I had known it. Is there—is there anything wrong with the business?"

"Wrong with the business? Oh, no! Business was never better."

"What then?"

"I don't understand you?"

"I fail to see why there should be any trouble in understanding me," replied Talbot, proudly.

"I haven't seen you for five years. I haven't seen New York, my native city, within my recollection; ever since I was a child I have been kept abroad, now at this school, now at that, until at last graduating from the Oxford University and finding myself within a few days of my majority, I felt a natural desire to come home, and I have come, only to be received in this extraordinary style. By Jove, father, I shan't stand it. If—I'm in the way I'll get out. I can earn my own living—I don't care a rush for the millions people say you're worth. What I want is a little fatherly affection, which you have never shown me, and—"

"There, there—that's enough," interrupted Mr. Ackerman, sternly. "Talbot, sit down."

The young man dropped into the nearest chair with flushed face and indignant eyes.

"You are here and it can't be helped," said Mr. Ackerman after a little. "I—you—look here, have you been to dinner?"

"No, of course not; I just got off the ship."

"Good. Don't dine. Take dinner with me at the house. Be here, say at ten minutes to four and we'll go up together. I—I have much that I want to say to you, my boy, but I can't say it here. To-night at the house I—will. Why do you stare at it so! Did you ever see it before?"

It was a very singular object at which Talbot was looking—odd enough, in fact, to attract any one's attention.

It lay upon Mr. Ackerman's desk beside the pile of bonds, a string of big gold coins, not one of them of smaller size than a Spanish doubloon, all fastened together by silver links, while at the ends were the two halves of a clasp, also of silver.

It was a veritable belt of gold, yet too small to span a waist much bigger than a baby's, although it seemed to have been constructed for just that purpose and nothing else.

Talbot leaning forward, took it up and examined it curiously.

"Well?" asked Mr. Ackerman inquiringly, looking fixedly at him from beneath his heavy brows.

"It attracted my attention on account of its oddity," replied his son slowly. "I've been something of a coin collector, some of the pieces are very rare and valuable too."

"Do you recognize them?" repeated the banker impatiently.

"Why, yes, here is a California slug of fifty dollars, a five-pound piece of George II., a Mexican doubloon, a Portuguese gold Joe, a noble of King Edward I., an ancient Indian coin, and——"

"No, no!" interrupted the bank president. "I mean do you recognize this belt of gold coins as a whole; as anything which awakens long-forgotten memories? Does it recall to you——"

"By Jove, father, now you speak of it I do remember. I seem to see myself a little toddler with this thing buckled about my waist."

"Yes, yes."

"I think there is a boat connected with it. I am in the boat—so are you, and——"

"A gentleman to see you, sir!" spoke a voice at the door, suddenly. "Mr. J. Slingwater—here is his card."

If the bank president had turned white at the unexpected entrance of his son he was doubly so now, for his face had grown as pale as death.

"Slingwater—did you say Slingwater?" he gasped.

"That's the name, sir. Shall I show him in? He's rather a common-looking person, sir. I thought perhaps he might be engaged to do some work for you——"

"No, no," interrupted Mr. Ackerman. "I never heard the name before. Show him in—no, stay, I'll come out. I—— Ah! too late!"

The last exclamation was spoken in a whisper.

Certainly it was too late to prevent the unwelcome visitor from seeing the belt of gold if it was to this Mr. Ackerman's exclamation referred.

He had evidently taken upon himself to follow the clerk to whom he had intrusted his card, for he now stood in the doorway, peering inside the bank president's private office with a single optic fixed upon the belt, and a most sinister expression overspreading a particularly ugly face.

"Shut the door!" exclaimed Mr. Ackerman, furiously. "Shut the door—I am busy now and can see no one. If this person wishes to speak with me let him wait."

The clerk obeyed, almost pushing the intruder across the threshold and slamming the door in his face.

"Father! What is the matter?" exclaimed Talbot the instant they found themselves alone.

The banker, however, did not reply.

Sweeping the remaining bonds into the bag he thrust it into his son's hand, at the same time putting the belt of coins into a drawer.

"Listen, Talbot," he said hurriedly. "There is something the matter. I—you—that is—but I can't explain now, only I want you to understand that in spite of my singular reception, I thank God for sending you suddenly to me, as he has done. Take this bag, my boy, and hurry to my house. You have the number. At precisely six o'clock I shall join you at dinner, and I will then explain everything. Now go."

He opened a door which Talbot had not previously observed, and pushed him gently out into the main hallway of the building, immediately closing it behind him, and turning the key in the lock.

"It all comes at once," he muttered, picking up the bit of cardboard across which the name J. Slingwater had been hastily scrawled. "It all comes at once—they hardly give me time to get my breath. All I need is a few hours, and then——"

He tapped the bell upon his desk.

"Show the gentlemen in. I'm at leisure now."

A short man, roughly dressed, with a scarred, weather-beaten face, and one eye closed, entered the room, and the door was shut.

Just one half hour later the door was opened, and the one-eyed man passed out again.

"You'll be here at four o'clock?" the curious clerks heard Mr. Ackerman remark.

The one-eyed man simply nodded and walked away.

It was a little strange.

At half-past three o'clock that afternoon Mr. Ackerman dismissed for the day every clerk in the bank except the cashier. At precisely a quarter before four he hurriedly left himself, and walked out by the inner door—something which he had never done before.

At two minutes past four Mr. Nibson entered the bank, which no more than eight minutes later was filled with an excited crowd, listening with open mouths to the lawyer's statement of how he had found the door wide open and not a soul to be seen until he had discovered the body of the cashier lying dead across the threshold of the private office, shot through the heart.

CHAPTER III.

WHO KILLED THE CASHIER?

Who had killed the cashier?

That was the question.

Already Mr. Warner, acting in his official capacity as a director of the bank, had taken charge, and a messenger, hurriedly dispatched to the New street station, had returned with a captain of the police.

The banking offices had been cleared of the crowd, too, Mr. Warner, Nibson the lawyer, the janitor of the building, the bank watchman, who of had just come, and a few gentlemen, tenants of the adjacent offices, alone remaining behind the now securely locked doors.

"You say that when you entered the bank you found the door wide open?" questioned the police captain, drawing Mr. Nibson and Mr. Warner to one side.

"That's it," replied the Englishman. "It struck me as very strange, too, don't you know, and I began to look round, and then discovered the poor fellow lying there dead. 'Pon my word it almost took my breath away."

"Was he quite dead?"

"Dead as a smelt."

"You heard no shot fired?"

"No, sir."

"What time was this?"

"Four o'clock."

"Two minutes to four," put in Mr. Warner. "You had just left my office, you know, Nibson, and I happened to glance at the clock as you went out."

"It might have been a minute, more or less," replied the lawyer. "I didn't notice particularly."

"But a minute, more or less, makes a vast difference here," said the police captain.

Then aloud:

"Mr. Robbins, what time did you say you heard that shot?"

"Four o'clock," answered a gentleman, whose offices were on the opposite side of the hall from the bank.

"Are you sure?"

"That's what my watch said. I looked at it a moment later."

"Is your watch right?"

"So far as I know it is."

"How about your clock, Mr. Warner?"

"Well, I won't swear to it," replied the broker.

"Nor I to my watch," said Robbins. "I heard the shot and others heard it, too, and the next thing I saw was Mr. Nibson running out. 'There's murder been done in there!' he said, and then——"

"Yes, that's what I said," interrupted Nibson, nodding affirmatively. "And as I started for a

policeman you called my attention to the fact that the rear door leading out of Mr. Ackerman's private office was standing open. I said that I would go for a policeman, and you started for the Pine street entrance to this building to see if any one was trying to escape in that direction—that was just the way it worked, I believe."

"Precisely," replied Mr. Robbins. "I made for Pine street, but I didn't see any one. On the contrary there wasn't a soul in the hall at the time, and——"

"What time did you see Mr. Nibson go into the bank?" asked a quiet voice behind the group, and Mr. Warner, turning suddenly, saw that a stranger had come upon the scene, for a tall, elderly man, with a smoothly shaven face, and wearing a long blue coat of peculiar cut stood within three feet of him, apparently quite as much interested as himself.

"Brady!" cried the police captain, an expression of intense satisfaction overspreading his face; "you here already? I expected no such good luck as this when I telephoned, but I'm thankful you've come just the same. Gentlemen, allow me to introduce Old King Brady, by long odds the best detective we have on the force."

"Tut, tut! You flatter me," interposed the detective.

"Not at all, not at all. Mr. Nibson, you ought to know Brady?"

Evidently Mr. Nibson did know him, for they were already shaking hands.

"Brady has had several cases from my office," he said, "and I can testify that the captain here only tells the truth. Brady, permit me—Mr. Warner—Mr. Robbins. Now we ought to have some light thrown upon this mysterious affair."

"I was asking Mr. Robbins at what time you saw Mr. Nibson enter the bank?" inquired the old detective, after the general hand-shaking had subsided.

"I didn't see him go in," replied Mr. Robbins.

"I was busy writing when I heard the shot, and probably would not have seen him at all had not my attention been attracted by that."

"I'm positive it was no later than two minutes to four when he entered," put in Mr. Warner. "If anything, my clock is fast. I never knew it to lose."

"Am I to take charge of this case?" inquired Old King Brady.

"Certainly," replied the police captain.

"Then, first of all, gentlemen, we want a motive for this crime. Is there any one here representing the bank?"

"I am one of the directors," spoke up Mr. Warner.

"Then, possibly, you can suggest a motive."

"I'm sure I cannot. Poor Maxwell was a most faithful fellow, always at his post and without an enemy as far as I am aware. If you could see Mr. Ackerman, now——"

"Where is Mr. Ackerman?"

"Probably at the club. He usually goes there at this hour."

"Did any one see him go out?"

"He went out about a quarter to four by the Pine street door," answered the janitor, who had drawn near.

"Humph! Then it may have been he who left the door of the private office open."

"It wouldn't be like Ackerman," mused Mr. Warner. "Still——"

"Still what?"

"Nothing, except that it struck me as just a trifle odd that Ackerman should leave by the Pine street entrance on this particular day at a quarter before four, when for the last ten years he has invariably gone out by the Wall street entrance at precisely four o'clock."

"A man may alter his habits."

"Ordinary men, I grant you, but not Ack-

erman. He was most methodical. Each day he did precisely the same thing at precisely the same time and in precisely the same way. He is known as 'Old Regularity' at the club."

"There is something else just a bit odd which, perhaps, I ought to mention," said the janitor. "Which is?" asked the detective.

"Why, all hands at the bank here were off by half-past three this afternoon—something entirely unusual."

"Evidently the cashier was not off," said Old King Brady, waving his hand slightly toward the ghastly object on the floor.

"No, not him—that's one. I was speaking to the paying teller, who always goes out Pine street, and he told me that the president fairly insisted upon them going, that for his part he did not want to go, for his work was only half done. 'Something is wrong with the old man, Pat,' says he. 'He's not been himself all day. Why, the first thing this morning he made one of the bookkeepers go with him to the Safe Deposit and bring up a tin box full of bonds, what he only took down there yesterday, and all day long there's been people running in to see him—the quarest lot,' he says, mentioning his son what's been in England all his life, and a rough-lookin' feller with one eye. That's what he says to me, gents, and there you have it for just what it's worth."

Now whatever might have been the value of the janitor's information as received from the paying teller its effect upon Mr. Warner was too noticeable to escape the detective's eye.

"What's the matter?" he inquired.

"Why, it's just a bit singular about those bonds," replied the broker, with some hesitation.

"Why so?"

"I bought them for Ackerman only yesterday. I helped him take them to the Safe Deposit and saw them put in the vault. There is a clean half million in those bonds, and what is more they do not belong to him."

"Ah!"

"No. At least so he told me."

"To whom do they belong?"

"He said at the time they were for a customer—that is all I know."

"Is it *all* you know, Mr. Warner?" said Old King Brady, quietly. "If so your face certainly belies your words; and yours, too, Mr. Nibson. It is my candid opinion that you both know something about this business as yet untold. What might have been the value of those bonds?"

"Well, Ackerman told me that there were over half a million," said Mr. Warner, who appeared to be growing more nervous every moment, while as for Nibson, a most singular expression had passed across his florid countenance. It was surprise, rage, fear and disgust, all mingled in one, seen by Old King Brady to come and go like a shadow, and then a smile had assumed its place.

Already the lawyer was the same calm, self-confident man of the world as usual."

Yet what the detective had seen he had seen, and he drew the instant conclusion that Mr. Nibson had been more than disturbed by the broker's allusion to the bonds.

"Half a million in bonds! A very valuable package," he said, quietly. "Were they bought for the bank, Mr. Warner, or by Mr. Ackerman for his customer on private account?"

"Private account, he said."

"Humph! Then if Mr. Ackerman took them from the Safe Deposit he may have given them to his customer, or they may still be in the vault which I see is standing open. It would be well enough to find out, and I would suggest in addition that it would be well enough to see if there

has been a robbery committed here as well as a murder. I— Ah, gentlemen, I thought so. I've struck the right cord now. You have heard the rumors afloat concerning the condition of the bank. Out with it. There is no sort of use in keeping anything back."

Mr. Warner's face showed grave anxiety.

Evidently the detective had hit the truth.

"That's it—that's what's troubling us," he stammered. "There have been rumors—I am a director here, and—"

"And you perhaps know no more than I do about the affairs of the bank," suggested Old King Brady.

"I don't know much—I confess it."

"And you, Mr. Nibson—you had business here—"

"Merely to obtain a discount," replied the lawyer. "I am on about \$50,000 of Ackerman's paper, don't you know—that's what's the matter with me."

"I think," said the police captain, "that Mr. Brady's suggestion that we examine the vault is an excellent one. We may not be able to learn anything of great interest, but then on the other hand we may."

"I'll leave the task to you, gentlemen," said the detective. "Mr. Warner is the man to undertake it. Meanwhile, I'm going to look about in the private office a bit."

Leaving the group, the detective stepped over the body of the dead cashier which lay across the threshold of the private office awaiting the arrival of the coroner, and entered the room.

For a moment he paused, bending over the unfortunate man; then rising he muttered:

"Killed at close range; that's certain; looks as though at the moment the shot was fired he was engaged in a struggle with his murderer, and I believe that such is the truth."

It was not usual for Old King Brady to draw hasty conclusions.

Was he right or wrong in this case?

Truly it was difficult to say. If appearance went for anything, to discover the murderer of Peter Maxwell was likely to prove an exceedingly difficult task.

Entering the private office, Old King Brady looked carefully about him.

Everything was in perfect order; the furnishings were particularly elegant, and at the same time substantial; yet in these days of official crookedness all this went for nothing, as the detective was only too well aware.

There were three doors to the office. One communicating with the banking-room, another with the hall, which stood wide open, while the third, apparently, concealed a closet. This door Old King Brady tried to open, but found it locked.

He then closed the door leading to the hall, and was just about to return to the bank, where several excited exclamations on the part of Mr. Warner had been heard, when his attention was attracted to a row of drawers on one side of the desk, which he correctly assumed to be Mr. Ackerman's, from the fact that the topmost drawer stood wide open, having to all appearances been forced by means of some blunt instrument of the nature of a burglar's jimmy.

Here a clew appeared to present itself, and to all appearance it was an important one.

A hasty examination of the contents of the drawer revealed nothing save a mass of papers of no significance, so far as the detective could judge; but upon looking more closely, he saw that an attempt had been made to force the second drawer, which could only have failed on account of some unexpected interruption frightening the would-be burglar off.

"Some one has been at work here," muttered Old King Brady, as without the slightest hesita-

tion he drew from his pocket a bunch of those curiously-shaped keys termed skeletons, and opened the drawer.

"What's this? What's this?" he continued, for now he had thrust his hand into the drawer and taken out an object well calculated to excite surprise.

It was a belt of golden coins—the same, of course, that Mr. Ackerman had exhibited to his son some hours before.

It needed but a glance at this to show Old King Brady that he had run against something of importance.

A hasty examination of the belt was sufficient to reveal its barbarous workmanship.

Rudely fastened to each other by rough links of gold the coins offered an ornament which could hardly have been worn by any one in a civilized country, yet that it was intended for wear was shown by the clasp.

But, on the other hand, it was entirely too small to go round the waist of any one but a child, and its weight seemed to preclude the thought that it had been intended for a necklace, although such was the first idea that suggested itself to the detective's mind.

"This is what they were after," muttered Old King Brady, confidently. "It was certainly to obtain this that the drawers were broken into. By whom? Some one who must have known it was there. That goes without saying. I—Helle! what's the row outside?"

A sharp exclamation from the banking-room had attracted his attention.

"It's ruin, that's what it is!" he heard Mr. Warner's voice almost shouting. "Good Heavens! this is a terrible affair!"

Old King Brady laid the belt of gold upon the desk and strode into the bank.

An excited group stood before the vault.

"It's just as you thought, Brady," said the police captain, cynically.

"Robbery?"

"I should say so! The vault has been simply gutted!"

"Cleaned out completely," added Mr. Warner with a groan.

"Is it possible?"

"Not only possible, but so," responded the broker. "Everything is gone—bonds, cash, securities—all there was. It will ruin me. I have been blind—blind!"

A few moments of blank silence ensued, broken only by the snapping of a match.

Mr. Nibson was lighting a cigar.

"Looks to me as though we wanted Ackerman here," he said coolly, puffing the smoke in Mr. Warner's face.

"So I say," added the police captain. "Does any one know where he can be found?"

"He lives at No. — Fifth avenue," groaned Mr. Warner, "but at this hour he is usually at the club."

"But," said Old King Brady, who had been examining the interior of the vault, "the funds of the bank could hardly have been carried away in Mr. Ackerman's pocket since the departure of the clerks at half-past three. Is it not possible that they have been sent away on deposit? Such a wholesale robbery in broad daylight is unprecedented. I—hello! how came that door open?"

While speaking, Old King Brady had chanced to glance back into the private office, and perceived to his astonishment that the door leading to the hall, which he had been so careful to shut, now stood open to its widest extent.

"What's the matter?" demanded the police captain.

But Old King Brady was already inside the private office,

"Mutter enough!" he exclaimed. "While we have been wasting time here, some one—the

murderer, perhaps—has been concealed in this closet. We have been blind—blind as moles!"

Not only was the outer door open, but the closet door also, and what was still more startling, the belt of gold had disappeared from Mr. Ackerman's desk.

CHAPTER IV.

KNOCKING AT THE DOOR.

At precisely six o'clock the door bell of the gloomy old mansion on lower Fifth avenue, so long the home of Mr. Charles Ackerman, rang out a resounding peal.

Upon the steps stood Talbot Ackerman, prompt to his appointment, and wholly unconscious of the exciting occurrences which had taken place at the bank after his visit at an earlier hour in the day.

It would be hard to describe the thoughts which filled the mind of Talbot Ackerman as he stood waiting for a response to his ring.

They were puzzling even to himself.

Disgusted and perplexed at the singular reception accorded him by his father, the young man had spent the afternoon in wandering about the city aimlessly, anxious only for the arrival of the hour which was to bring explanation and throw some light upon his future, which just now seemed a hopeless blank.

There was no answer to Talbot's first ring, nor was there any to his second, but before he had rung the third time, which he resolved should be the last, the sound of quick footsteps were heard behind him, and, upon turning, he beheld his father looking pale and agitated in the act of ascending the stoop.

"Ah, Talbot! You are prompt, I see," he remarked, fitting a key to the night-latch and throwing open the door. "Walk in. I am sorry to have kept you waiting? but business of great importance detained me."

He closed and double-locked the door.

"I make it a rule to be prompt at my engagements, father," replied the young man, glancing about him in some surprise.

Nor was this without reason.

All his life Talbot Ackerman had been taught to regard his father as a man of wealth and influence. Without, perhaps, expecting to find a palace behind the door which had so tried his patience, he had at least looked for a comfortably furnished residence, but here, to his amazement, he could discover nothing but an empty house.

The hall was carpetless and bare of furniture; the parlor and library, into which his father ushered him successively, were in the same condition. It was not until they had reached the dining-room that the first trace of occupancy was discovered, and this consisted only of a table, over which a cloth was spread, and one or two plain chairs.

"Talbot," said Mr. Ackerman, shortly, "I've sold out here. I'm going away."

"Going away? Why, I thought——"

"You thought that I was a rich man; that you were coming over here to live a life of idleness and ease at my expense. You thought——"

"Stop, father, I'm no idler. You have always supplied me liberally with money. I had the right to think——"

"There, there, boy, I was wrong. You had the right, but—well, I might as well come out flat-footed at once. Talbot, you have come to me at a most unfortunate time. I am utterly ruined; the bank is ruined. To-morrow its doors will be closed forever, and I shall be a wanderer on the face of the earth."

It was all out now.

Sinking into one of the chairs Mr. Ackerman

leaned his head upon the table and groaned aloud.

Talbot was dumfounded.

He knew not what reply to make.

Here, indeed, was a complete overthrow of all his ambition—all his hopes.

"Is it, then, so bad as all that, father?" he asked at length, in a hollow voice.

"Worse!"

"How worse?"

"Dishonor!"

Talbot shuddered.

"You don't mean that you have robbed the bank?" he gasped.

"Of every penny there is—nothing left."

"But this is horrible!"

"So horrible that it has almost made a maniac of me!" cried the president of the Twenty-fifth National, fiercely. "Look here, my boy, I'm a villain, a wretch, a scoundrel! I have played for high stakes, and I won, but now the game has gone against me. I—— Great God! there's some one ringing at the door!"

A resounding peal at the bell brought Mr. Ackerman to his feet.

"Look out of the front window there and see who it is," he whispered to Talbot, and at the same time he made a dart toward the back window and threw up the sash.

Now, for the first time, Talbot saw why the dining-room was so dark—that only with difficulty had he been able to watch the workings of his father's features.

Behind the house a new building rose, as yet not half completed. The walls were so near that he could almost touch them. Through one of the sashless windows he could see the floor beams and studding, and from the way in which the light fell upon them he rightly judged that the roof was not yet laid.

"Quick! slip into the parlor and see who it is, my boy," repeated the banker, an expression of extreme terror overspreading his face.

Talbot obeyed with sinking heart.

Every hair on his head was an honest hair; truth blazed from his bright black eyes; his heart was uprightness itself.

The very thought of lending himself to such villainy as this was revolting, but he was alone and penniless in a land absolutely strange to him.

All his life he had leaned upon this reed, believing it to be an oak, and now the reed had broken, plunging him into a sea of doubt and difficulty, to buffet with whose billows he was wholly unprepared.

"It's only a man with a tray," he whispered upon returning. "I should think he might be bringing you in your dinner by the looks."

"Ah, good!" exclaimed Mr. Ackerman, evidently much relieved. "I—I might have known. I—open the door, my boy, and take it in. It is your dinner. I want nothing myself. Be sure you lock the door after you, and on no account let the fellow step into the hall."

Talbot hurried to the door, received the tray and brought it in.

It contained a plain but substantial repast, sent in from a neighboring restaurant, and Mr. Ackerman proceeded to place it upon the table without a word.

"Eat your dinner," he said, hurriedly, when these arrangements were completed. "I have something to attend to up-stairs. Presently I will see you again."

"But——" began Talbot.

"But what? Don't waste time. You must eat. You are to go with me, and——"

"You must not expect me to help you make off with your stealings, father. I can't do that."

Mr. Ackerman, who was half across the threshold by this time, turned, and for an instant

gazed fixedly at the honest face directed toward his own.

"I don't expect anything of the sort," he said, slowly. "The fact is, Talbot, that although there are hundreds of men in this city who, by noon to-morrow, will be shouting out about the wrong I have done them, not one will have half as good a right to shout as you, and that's the truth."

"I shall never join the hue and cry against you, father."

"No, no, I don't intend to give you a chance to do so," replied the banker, in a stifled voice. "I can't save the others, but you I can save, and what is more, I have resolved to do it. Talbot, understand one thing. By coming suddenly upon me as you did, you have saved me from one more crime, and a most dastardly one at that. You did it, my boy, and what's more, the sight of your honest face and your manly ways, have brought repentance. I have been a great scoundrel all my life, but from this moment I am resolved to do my best to undo the wrong I have done in the past as far as still lies in my power. My boy, trust in me, and you have nothing to fear."

He turned abruptly and was gone before Talbot could utter a word. The next moment, and his footsteps could be heard ascending the carpetless stairs, a door slammed, and then all was still.

Plunged in the deepest amazement Talbot waited, heedless of the fact that the dinner was becoming entirely cold.

What did it all mean? What could it mean?

Ruin and disgrace. Knavery and crime were apparent enough certainly, but behind all this, if the ambiguous words of Mr. Ackerman meant anything, there seemed to be something else—something most intimately concerning himself and his wholly mysterious past.

Yes, the past of Talbot Ackerman was all a mystery, and yet he had never so regarded it in that light until now.

Why had his father kept him in Europe since his earliest recollections, visiting him only at rare intervals?

Why had he refused to furnish him with the slightest information concerning his mother and his early life? Why had he rather sought by his replies to the boy's eager questions to stamp out rather than fasten those memories which most fathers would rejoice to have awakened in the bosom of their sons?

It was mysterious and beside all this there was another thing.

Why had Mr. Ackerman insisted so strenuously upon his son being instructed in Spanish that Talbot could both speak and read the language of the Peninsula with a facility equal to the English, which he regarded as his mother tongue?

"Well, by Jove! This is a pretty nest of troubles that I've tumbled into!" muttered Talbot at last. "I'll do what I can for the governor, for never in my life has he denied me any reasonable request; but one thing is certain, I'll not go back on my conscience. I don't want any stolen goods; I don't want any crooked memories to torment me, and I don't intend to have them. Meanwhile as I'm hungry I think I'll eat my dinner and be ready to take things as they come."

Thus Talbot made a hearty meal, for he had plenty of time afforded him; the moments lengthened, an hour passed, and still his father did not return.

It was a trying time for Talbot. He smoked up his after-dinner cigar, and then attacked a second, quite contrary to his usual custom; at last even this was finished, and still there came no footsteps on the stairs, nor sounds on the floor above.

What was Mr. Ackerman about? Why this strange and ominous silence?

As the darkness increased, and the shadows in the bare, cheerless room grew deeper, a dreadful, sickening fear crept over the boy.

Suppose his father had killed himself?

He indulged this fancy until it seemed to become a real thing; he found himself imagining that he had heard a cry for help, the noise of a fall, and had mistaken them for sounds from the new building, outside the windows, plenty enough and loud enough when he first entered the room, but which had now entirely died away.

He even began to see in imagination his father's body lying upon the floor above him rigid and motionless, now with a bloody knife, and then a revolver clutched in his nerveless hand.

"I wish he would come! Oh, I wish he would come!" he exclaimed at last, springing up and beginning to pace the floor.

He had covered the space between the window and the door perhaps half a dozen times and was just returning to the window, when all at once he saw a face outside pressed against the glass.

It was a peculiar face—a horrible, leering face. Although Talbot could scarcely have described a single feature a moment later, there was still that about it which seemed to make his very blood run cold.

For a single instant it peered in at him, disappearing as suddenly as it had come.

"By Jove! Who was that?" breathed the boy, paralyzed as it were for the moment. Then recovering himself he sprang toward the window, flung up the sash and looked out into shadows beyond.

Now he saw how easy it had been for the owner of the face to approach the glass.

It was only necessary to lean forward a trifle from the sashless window of the new building and the thing was done.

It had been a real thing, too, and no vision of an over-excited imagination, as for the minute Talbot had been almost inclined to think, for now as he listened he could hear the sound of footsteps crossing the beams inside the new building; presently the sound died away and all was still.

"I can't stand this any longer, and I won't," thought Talbot, as he hastily closed the window and shot the catch in place. "I must find out what has become of my father. I'm not going to stay here alone another moment. If there are spies watching the house I'm sure I don't see how he's going to escape."

He hurried out into the hall, and at the foot of the stairs stood for a moment motionless listening, but still could hear no sound in the room above.

Of course this only served to increase his anxiety, and by the time he reached the top of the stairs Talbot found himself so wrought up that he could scarcely muster courage to knock on the first door which presented itself, nor were matters improved any by the utter silence which followed his knock.

He threw open the door and struck a match.

It was an empty room which met his gaze.

Just so with the next into which he penetrated.

A few moments sufficed to show him that there was no one on that floor.

Hurrying to the floor above, Talbot now tried the door nearest the head of the stairs.

This was locked, and the instant his hand touched the knob he could hear his father's voice calling from within:

"Is that you, Talbot?"

"Yes. What in the world is the matter with you? I thought you would never come."

"It's all right, my son," came the reply, and the door was opened?

There was a light in the room, and it showed Talbot an apartment almost as bare as those on the floor below, for it contained only a bed, a chair and a desk, over which some papers were thrown.

"I've been writing," said Mr. Ackerman, "but I'm through now. I forgot how time was passing. Sit down for a moment, my boy, and I'll be ready for you. I have something to say of great importance—what! I see by your face that you also have something to tell."

"A man looked in through the window a minute ago, father."

Mr. Ackerman stared, but seemed quickly to recover himself.

"Probably the watchman in the new building," he said.

"Do you think so?"

"It could have been no one else."

"I thought it might be a detective, father."

"That is unlikely. The fact is, Talbot, that there is hardly a possibility of my defalcation being discussed before to-morrow. I own I was a bit nervous awhile ago, but really there is nothing to fear."

While speaking, Mr. Ackerman was busy arranging a number of sheets of paper covered with writing. These he now rolled up tightly, and springing an elastic band around the roll, thrust it into the long alligator skin bag which Talbot had seen at the bank.

But was it the same bag?

Sure at first, Talbot now began to question this, for there upon the floor lay two bags exactly alike.

Mr. Ackerman now picked up both and flung them upon the bed; then going to the closet he took down an overcoat, drew it on, and took an umbrella from a corner. Next he put his hat on, and then turning, faced his son, who stood gloomily regarding these evident preparations for flight.

"Talbot," he said, slowly, "how would you like to go to Peru?"

"To Peru?"

"That's what I said."

"Are you going?"

"I am. I have engaged passage for the Isthmus in the Acapulco, to-morrow's steamer. From there I take a steamer for Callao. I ought to be in Lima inside of three weeks."

"But I thought you just said you had lost everything? It costs money to take a trip like that."

"Undoubtedly; but I am not without means. Talbot, there is half a million dollars in that bag."

Mr. Ackerman waved his hand toward the bed as he spoke, and stood watching the changes of expression which came and went upon Talbot's face.

"And you want me to help you make off with the funds of the bank?" demanded the boy, his eyes flashing.

"I do not," replied the banker, calmly.

"But you said—"

"I said that there was half a million in that bag—so there is, but the money never belonged to the bank."

"Who does it belong to?"

"That is of no consequence. It is not the property of the bank and never was."

"If it is your own private property, I think you ought to give it up."

"But it ain't my own private property. It was intrusted to me and I have kept it intact. I now propose to restore it to its rightful owner, and—heavens, who is that?"

A loud ring at the bell echoed through the do-

serted home. It was immediately followed by another and then a third, louder still.

Mr. Ackerman at once extinguished the gas and moved toward the door.

"We must see who that is before we answer," he whispered, and he pushed on into the front hall bed-room, and softly raising the sash peered out, drawing back as he did so with a startled cry.

"What is it?" whispered Talbot, anxiously.

"My boy," answered his father, "it is a detective—it is the famous Old King Brady, and worse than that his eye caught mine as it looked down. Ha! Don't you hear that? There is not a minute to be lost."

The ringing of the bell was not repeated, but in its stead a thunderous rapping at the door echoed through the house.

Mr. Ackerman sprang back into the room they had just vacated, and seizing one of the bags on the bed threw up the window.

"I'm going this way," he whispered. "I'll take the bonds. You look out for the other bag, which contains a change of clothing. Meet me on board the Pacific Mail steamer to-morrow. She sails at noon. You may not see me until after we get outside the Hook, but I'll be there. Talbot, do not fail me. Your whole future depends upon you fulfilling my commands to the letter. Good-bye!"

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